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T LEAGUERS

SHAN F. BULLOCK

Herbert



Vivian Mercier

THE RED LEAGUERS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE AWKWARD SQUADS

BY THRASNA RIVER

RING O' RUSHES

THE CHARMER

THE BARRYS

IRISH PASTORALS

THE SQUIREEN

THE RED LEAGUERS

BY

SHAN F. BULLOCK

WITH A MAP

NEW YORK
M'CLURE, PHILLIPS & CO.

1904

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THE RED LEAGUERS

CHAPTER I

THE BARK OF THE FOX

I WAS leaning over the gate, smoking idly and watching the stars. The night was chill somewhat, and full of the brooding presence of spring; fragrant, fresh, and wonderfully quiet. Between me and the stars seemed no further and no lonelier than between me and the mountain lying dim away in the west, with lights twinkling on its face and the long back of it stretched in the shine of a waning moon. Nothing stirred in the wide-spreading country-side; even the dogs for once had gone asleep. Peace lay among all the hills, and among the hedges; was folded round each humble cottage set there in the brooding fields. Yet within the cottages, I knew, was no peace, and their doors were closed on strange ferment about the hearthstones. Rumours of plotting were in the air. Hungry eyes were gleaming fiercely in many a home, wintry discontent now kindled within them to madness of rebellion. Within gunshot, that lovely night, I could have lifted a hundred latches and surprised treason by a hundred firesides. Only my humour, that night, prompted no such adventuring. I felt peacefully inclined. Health was reviving in me with the new spring. My spirits ran high. I called no man enemy just then; not even the man who shadowed

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my primrose path. Idly I stood watching the stars and thinking of her who was my star.

In a while a foot sounded on the road, and turning I saw a man come up between the hedges. Slowly he came, his feet blundering over the stones, head bent, and hands under his coat-tails; then stopped at the gate and faced me.

"Good evenin'," said he.

"Good evening," I answered.

"It's great weather," he said and looked at the moon, twisting his face across his shoulder.

"The best," I replied; then struck a match on the gate and held it to my pipe.

Its light fell on the man's face, flashing it into sudden distinctness. I remembered it instantly; indeed its features might not easily be forgotten. It was wrinkled, sallow, sharp, with high cheek bones and a drooping nose; had little narrow eyes that pierced deep, a wide, thin-lipped mouth and bushy red whiskers—the face of an old grey fox, furtive, fathomless, cunning. Just a glimpse I had across my pipe; then:

"You'll be knowin' me," said the fox, asserting more than questioning.

I dropped the match. "Well, partly," I said. "I've seen you before, but when I don't know; and I don't know your name."

"To be sure. Just so now." He paused with his eyes on the moon; turned quickly. "Well, would the name of Patrick Moran be helpin' ye?" was his word.

It would be helping me. Often I had heard of the man. By report, if not by acquaintance, I knew him

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for the blackest sheep in three townlands. I nodded. "Yes," said I; "your name's familiar."

"H'm. I'd be thinkin' that." He paused whilst he drew out a black pipe and lighted it; then rested an elbow on the gate and stood looking across the fields. "Your health would be better," he remarked.

"Well, yes. I suppose it would. It's kind of you to ask."

"Arrah, not at all." He waved his pipe stem. "Man, it's only common decency to ask. An' you'll be for Beyond"—he jerked a thumb eastwards—"in a week or two, I suppose?"

I resented his inquisitiveness. "Maybe," I answered shortly; "maybe not." But my curtness failed. He looked round.

"Maybe not," he drawled, his eyes hard upon me. "Is that so? An' what now would be keepin' ye?"

This was insolence. "My business," I snapped, and turned my back to the gate. But even contempt was lost upon the man. Slowly he shifted round, leant his arms on the rail and bent forward.

"Tell me," he asked in a sleek whisper, his face close to mine. "Has anyone been before me to give ye a word?" I did not answer. "Has there?" he asked again. Still I kept silent; so he laid a hand on my shoulder; and with that I turned quickly.

"Look here," I said, "I don't know what you mean, and I don't want to know, and I don't want your company. Are you blind that you can't see that for yourself?" He raised his hands.

"Whisht, wisht. I didn't mean to anger ye. I meant nothin'. I only wanted to make sure. Easy now, till I tell ye." He leant far across the gate,

pushing his face towards me. "It's this way," he said. "A few of us over beyond"—he jerked his head backwards—"are wishful to speak with ye before ye go. We want your advice——"

I interrupted him. "Over where?" I asked.

"Aw, beyond in Armoy; just across the fields a mile or so."

"And who are the few?"

"Aw, just a few friends; people you've met maybe and know well enough."

"People like yourself?" said I, not without a touch of scorn.

"Ay. Just myself an' a few like me."

I stood smiling. I knew what Patrick Moran's friends were like; knew on what business they were likely to be assembled. Still, that was beside the question. "Well?" I said.

He sucked noisily at his pipe; then wiped its stem beneath his armpit and offered it to me.

"No, thank you," I said.

"As ye like." He spat on the road, put his pipe in his mouth again; leant over the rail. "Well, as I was sayin', we're wishful to see ye, Mr Shaw. Your opinion would be helpful. There's some business transactions that's troublin' us."

"What transactions?" I struck in.

"Ah, private transactions. You'll hear when you come."

"And supposing I don't come?"

He looked at me hard, so hard that I might have felt his gaze. "Tell me this," he said. "Aren't ye a friend of your own country—the place that bred ye—the land you've got your feet on?"

"Surely," I answered.

"Well, then, you'll be comin' to see us," said Patrick ; and with that drew back from the gate and stood eyeing me across it.

I could only smile again. It was all exactly as I had imagined. In my mind's eye I could see Patrick and his friends assembled to discuss their business transactions, doors closed, windows barred, a sentry at the step, whiskey in the jar, and among the company a fine spirit of adventure. So clearly did I picture all this that I had small need, or desire maybe, to make the seeing real ; besides I might see more than I wanted to see, and hear more, and implicate myself in dangerous matters. I knew well what doings were afoot in this country of mine ; and just then had little mind to meddle with them. Suppose the police to come knocking at Patrick's door and I behind it ? Suppose myself standing handcuffed before a magistrate ?

Pooh ! What law worth the name ran now in Ireland ? What policeman dared show his face in Armoy ? I might go in safety, stay in safety, come back diverted and perhaps something the wiser. I wanted change. There were a hundred things in this development of my country—things that in a few years had changed it almost beyond knowing—that I burned to understand. And now I had chance to see and know and understand ; chance that in a week or two would be gone for ever. Should I take it ? What did Patrick and his friends want of me ?

And with that Patrick broke into my reflections.

"Well, we'll be seeing ye then," he said. "About what time would ye be comin' ?"

I stood wavering, vexed with the man yet inclined to do his bidding. "Oh, I don't know," was my answer. "I might come and I might not. Perhaps one of these nights I'll just wander across the fields."

"I know." Patrick stood silent a minute. "Maybe it would be safer for yourself, all the same," he went on in his foxy way, "if ye made some kind of an appointment. Saturday night would be suitin' ye, we'll say?"

I affected indifference. "Oh, yes. I'm not tied for time. I'm my own master."

"It's good to be you," said Patrick. "Well, we'll leave it at Saturday then at eight o'clock. Anyone will tell ye where I live, if ye don't know already. An' if there's no one at the door just give it three raps with your knuckles. Good-night to you, Mr Shaw."

And turning about Pat marched down the road, head bent and hands nursing his coat-tails.

CHAPTER II

THE REVELATIONS OF NAPOLEON

ON the Saturday night I put a revolver in my pocket and started for Moran's. The way led from Lackan down about a mile to the crossroads below Hillside; thence turned sharp from the borders of Gorteen straight out into the wilds of Armoy, over naked hills and past wastes of bogland. It was a gloomy night, chill and holding promise of rain; and I went lonely between the hedges. Sometimes I met a man on the road who gave me good-evening, eyed me in passing and slouched on, or a girl carrying a basket, or a woman with a shawl over her head; occasionally I had glimpses of lighted cottages by the wayside, or dim windows on the hills; but for the most part I walked solitary, plodding on through the heavy dark, eyes on the road and feet grinding the stones. I had no fear, nor did I feel the loneliness; for by my side walked always a shadowy figure and kept me company. I saw her face, heard her voice through the moan of rising wind, now low and tender, now harsh and mocking. Why was it not always tender? Why sometimes did she mock me, this peasant girl whom in a few idle weeks I had come to love so well? Did she care for me, my Leah Hynes; or did she but pretend to care, playing with me in her

artless way, giving to another the affection I would have?

Another? That lout of a Jan Farmer, that clod-hopper from Emo? By heavens, he had better take care; and she too, my hillside charmer. I was not the man to be trifled with, or thwarted. In love as in war I might be desperate. Just another week she would have; and then—well, a week would show. And aflame I strode through the dark.

In a while I turned from the broad road and went splashing along a boreen that ran uphill past the desolate fields. The wind whistled in the whitethorns, raindrops stung my face. Here and there I went floundering among the ruts, cursing myself for a fool at every step. Was there on the earth such a God-forsaken country as Ireland, so miserable a race as its people? Mud, rain, poverty, starvation, slavery: there was Ireland. A people downtrodden, hopeless, a people patiently enduring its miseries and finding happiness amid them: there was the Irish. And here was I, confounded for a fool, bent on diversion among the slaves. I could have laughed at thought of myself.

Some six furlongs up the boreen, a gate opened on a lane that led me wallowing between stunted hedges towards a light that shone on the hillside, and brought me at last to the yard which lay before Moran's house. The door was shut, no one stood before it; so tramping noisily I came to the step and struck three times with my knuckles on the panels. There was a sound of shuffling feet, of clattering stools; then a bolt rang back, the door opened, and Moran stood before me.

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"Good evenin'," said he.

"Good evening," I answered; and stepped past him into the kitchen.

It was a large room, with a clay floor and plastered walls. Above, the thatch showed between soot-browned rafters; near the door stood a narrow dresser flanked with pots and tubs and baskets, facing it a turf fire burnt on the hearth, a paraffin lamp stood on a deal table, and about the floor, on stools and chairs, some five or six men, a woman and three children, sat hunched in the drifting smoke. Moran bolted the door behind me. The stools clattered round the hearth. Half-blinded and near choking, I stumbled towards an empty chair that stood before the fire.

"Good evenin'," went the voices.

"Good evening," said I; then pulled back the chair and sat down.

At first little was said. Sometimes one made a remark and another answered him; at times a man rose in the smoke, stumbled to the hearth to light his pipe and stumbled back; or one of the children whispered to its mother, or Moran building turf around the fire questioned me about the night. The smoke was blinding. The heat was great. Wherever I looked keen eyes were hard upon me, quick with curiosity and suspicion. It was a strange, almost an uncanny experience. More than once I felt like rising quick and making for the door. Then of a sudden the fire blazed up, and with that the gloom lightened, talk sprang amid the smoke; and pulling out my pipe I lighted it, crossed my knees, and fell to observing the company.

The woman was a weary-looking mortal with sleek

black hair and a sallow face ; the children hung timid about her skirts, hungry-eyed all of them, tattered, unkempt. Moran the fox I have already described ; and the others resembled him something, gaunt, keen-faced Hillsiders, clad in patched frieze or coarse tweeds—all but one, a large fleshy man with deep grey eyes, a square clean-shaven jowl, big loose mouth and big protruding ears, bushy eyebrows and grizzled hair straggling beneath his hat. Also he was better clad than the rest ; wore leggings and a green necktie, carried a silver watch-chain, and smoked a briar pipe. Him very soon I put down as leader of the company. He directed the talk. The others deferred to him. He had the important air of one knowing his own superiority. He sat leaning back against the chimney jamb, hat tilted slightly and legs crossed ; nor did he once, no matter what the talk, take his eyes from my face. The company called him Christy, locally he was known as Big Christy ; in full his name was Christopher Muldoon.

We were discussing local topics—landlords, agents, crops, markets—when of a sudden Christy set wide his knees, rested his elbows upon them and leant towards me, his face on the slant and eyes twisted below his gathered brows. “Ye must be findin’ this only a poor country, Mr Shaw,” said he in his pointed way, his big voice rolling through the smoke, “after all your travels and adventures in the world.”

I had not expected my doings in the world to be within Mr Muldoon’s knowledge ; but I gave rumour its due. “Well, hardly that,” I answered “Ireland’s not the best place in the world, maybe ; but——”

“There’s worse you’d think,” said Christy.

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"Perhaps so," I answered cautiously. "It's as good as can be expected."

"I know." Christy nodded. "Tell me, now, did ye find Cuba much of a garden the time ye were fightin' the Spaniards?"

Clearly rumour went far in Armoy. "'Twas warm enough, Mr Muldoon," said I with a laugh; then, encouraged by the company, went on to describe my adventures in Cuba.

"Dear, oh dear," said Christy, when I had finished. "Such things to have lived through. Bedad, sir, you're a bit of a hero. An', tell me, did ye go to the Philippines after that to hunt down ould Aguinaldo?"

Here was knowledge. "Ah no, Mr Muldoon," I said. "I missed the Philippines and ould Aguinaldo."

"But ye hit South Africa and the Boers," was Christy's retort; and I could but laugh my acknowledgments. But Christy did not laugh; only clasped his hands and shook his head at the floor.

"Ah, 'twas a villainous business," he muttered. "The poor unfortunate divils, with their wives an' childer took from them and themselves hunted like hares on the hills! Och, no wonder we'd be pityin' the cratures. An' now they're under the same big foot as ourselves." He looked up. "Tell me, didn't ye find their country somethin' like this?" And Christy swept all Ireland within his arm.

"Well, yes—something, Mr Muldoon."

"I know. I was imaginin' that. An' ye never had a notion that the Boers were a trifle like ourselves here,—like Pat there, an' Ned, an' the rest of us? Had ye now?"

Here was a question. I answered it warily, saying

that Pat and Ned and the rest had assuredly many points in common with the Boers, more perhaps than I might enumerate.

"You'd say we were as good men mebbe?" said Christy. "As hardy, an' as intelligent, an' as quick in the eye an' hand? Would ye, now?"

"I would, Mr Muldoon."

"An' you'd say mebbe"—Christy paused and looked me hard in the eyes—"that in their place we'd have done just as well, made as good a fight, shamed the power of all England an' brought her near to the dust? Eh?" said Christy, his eyes hard on mine.

That was another question, subtle, full of meaning. I began to see what was coming. But I was there for that; so boldly I answered Christy as he would have me answer.

Then a murmur ran through the smoke, and loud Christy smote his leg with a hand. "By God, it's true," he shouted. "In their place we'd have done the same. Brave boys, brave boys! You've gone down, but thanks to you an' all the rest the tyrant's on the brink; an' now, please God, she'll go to glory. Think of her," shouted Christy, a fist upraised, his face blazing; "think of her all them years ago an' think of her this mortal hour. *Then* the biggest tyrant of the crew an' the be-damndest: *now* the shrinkinest cur that walks this earth. Look at her there with only the ships between her an' perdition. Russia waitin' to grab up India; the States hungry for Canada; Germany ready with her new navy to spear the whale; France ready with her armies on the cliffs an' her submarines in the harbours only

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waitin' for the word. All the world against her. Not a friend under the stars of heaven. An ould image of a statesman guidin' her. Her government gone to pot. Credit broken, trade goin'; herself bankrupt a'most an' rotten to the heart. Oh, be the eternal King, she's done for. Limb be limb she'll drop away, colony be colony into the ocean, till only the carcase is left; an' then——" With a significant gesture Christy snapped his fingers at the floor and stamped England into the clay; then, to the sound of shuffling feet and creaking stools and the applause of the company, sat back in his chair and mopped his face.

My own share in the applause was generous. Eloquence like Christy's was not heard often outside Ireland. I had enjoyed it. Its fire moved me; its suddenness thrilled me; its imaginative sweep stirred my envy; nor could I say that truth was not in it. So I clapped my hands and bent towards Christy saying, "That's the talk for me, Mr Muldoon. By the pigs, it's great."

He looked swiftly at me. "D'ye mean that?" he asked.

"To be sure I do."

"Then——" He stopped; looked across the hearth. "Wouldn't it be near them childer's bedtime, Mary?" said he. And without a word Mary rose, took the children into the room that lay beyond the fire and closed the door.

So. Business was in hand, then. I heard the stools clatter nearer; saw Moran the fox step to the vacant chair by the closed door; saw Christy set elbows on knees again and bend towards me.

"You've been keepin' your eyes open," he suggested,

his voice sunk low, "the while you've spent these parts benefitin' your health? Doin' more, we'll say, than tryin' your devices wi' Jan Farmer's sweetheart?"

Ha! Was this what I had come for? Were the business transactions to be Jan's? I flushed angrily; but Christy waved a hand.

"Whisht," he said. "You're slower than ye look. I'll put it plainer. In your travels about the country have ye noticed any change in it? Would ye imagine that more was on foot than'd meet your eye?"

I understood. "Yes," I said. "I have noticed, and I have imagined." I looked round at the figures bending over their knees in the smoke. "It would be hard to sit here, for instance, without imagining."

Christy nodded. "An' what now would ye be noticin'?"

Briefly I told what I had noticed: the country flourishing, a spirit of nationality spreading, the people soberer, more reserved, anxious to know and to learn.

Christy nodded again. "Ay," he said. "Well, you've not been asleep mebbe. An' what now, if I may ask, is the thing you'd be imaginin' most?"

I considered a minute; then ventured boldly, "That the Boers have taught you all a lesson, Mr Muldoon, and that England may soon taste bitterness near home."

The stroke told. I heard the stools creak; saw Christy look at Moran; saw Christy bend nearer. "Tell me," he said. "Are *you* a friend of England?"

"Well—hardly."

"Of Ireland, then?"

"If I wasn't, you'd not find me here," I answered.

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"Wouldn't we." Christy sat reading me. "Suppose I called ye an English spy?"

That was too much. I flared up. "Suppose I marked your ugly face?"

But Christy never flinched. "Mark it," said he, in his insolent way.

"Yes, and I would too if you were worth it." I jumped to my feet. "Look here," I said, "it wasn't for this I tramped the fields to-night. I want none of your insults. I'm tired of your company. Come. Out of my way," I shouted to the figures that rose in the smoke and closed in before me. "Get back, you curs!"

But they did not get back, only closed the nearer. So whipping out my revolver I stepped upon the hearth; and with that Christy faced me, took me by the shoulders, and shook me hard. "Man, you're a fool," he said. "Chut! Can't ye see I was only testin' ye? Come, put up that play-toy, an' sit down till I tell ye. Whisht wi' your nonsense, an' sit down, I say. Boys, to your places." And the stools creaked.

Well, I sat down, and Christy pulled up his chair; and in his cautious way, with many a glance at the boys and many a look at Moran the fox, went on with his telling. It would weary you did I set down all his rigmarole; its substance was this:

For long Ireland had been waking. Men at home and abroad—in Ireland, the States, in England—had been watching, working, planning, getting ready. A vast organisation of true Irishmen had been formed, with capable leaders at its head and branches spreading through the world; through Ireland itself ran a huge

confederacy, guided, controlled, with branches in every parish, offshoots in every Hillside home. One man was at the head ; under him were leaders, under them the Irish people. All was secret ; all were sworn. Never in the world before was known such a conspiracy. The plan was perfect. Every detail was complete. To-morrow The Man Above had but to give the word and the hilltops would blaze their signals to all the faithful. For years this had been in hand ; now the day was near. The people were ready. England stood bound hand and foot. One stroke and Ireland was free, a nation at last. There was the secret of the change I had seen, there the meaning of what I had not seen but imagined. I had come to Ireland on the stroke of her supreme hour. Did I choose, work lay ready to my hand. "This minute," said Christy, his knees touching mine, his eyes quick on my face, "you've but to say the word, an'——" He waved his hand and left the rest to me.

It was startling, but not surprising. Christy had but formulated what I had suspected. I had been sure something was moving in this new Ireland. She would have been untrue to herself and her history, if sooner or later, she had not tried once more to shake off the Saxon yoke. And now the Saxon was at bay within his ramparts, and the world was crouched, and Ireland had her chance.

Her chance? Had she a chance? Was all so complete that, even as Christy said, her hour was indeed near? I doubted. I remembered past chances. I was used to Irish ways. I sympathised with my country, had longed often to see her people free, would give my life in her service ; but——

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Dead silence had fallen in the kitchen. All, I knew, were watching me ; waiting for my word, ready to act upon it. I took my eyes from the fire and looked at Christy.

"It's a big venture," I said.

"No bigger than it's worth," he answered.

"It means a rising—a rebellion?" I questioned.

"It means freedom, whatever the shape of it."

"Suppose you fail?"

"There's no supposin'. We're sure. An' bad can be no worse."

"No," said I; "perhaps not . . . There will be bloodshed."

"It depends. Blood's not what we want. But we're ready to give an' take it."

"I understand. And everything's ready?"

"I've told ye," answered Christy. "You'll know more when ye ask to know."

I nodded. "But you wouldn't have me jump in the dark, Mr Muldoon?"

"There's no dark," answered Christy. "An' there's no jumpin'."

"You mean I'm free?"

"Every man's free—except ourselves. We bind no man. He binds himself."

I thought that a strange saying; but did not question it, only turned to more practical things.

"You'll need arms?" said I.

"There's no need where there's plenty," was the ready reply.

"Oh. And ammunition?"

"Aw, there's more than stones in the hillsides," came back.

"I see. And there's a plan of campaign, I suppose?"

"Ye need suppose nothin', I tell ye. Ye can know when ye want to know."

"But—" A sudden thought struck me. "What about the Protestants, Mr Muldoon?" I asked, my mind busy with the past.

"They've been considered," answered Christy: "everyone's been considered. We'll fight no Protestants, an' hurt none—except they make us."

That was a new note in Hillside policy. It soothed me to hear it; proved to me more than any other word of Christy's that wise men had shaped the conspiracy. "Well, I'm glad to know that, Mr Muldoon. For, as you know, I'm a Protestant myself."

"Ye needn't say it," spoke he. "There's nothin' about ye we don't know."

"Ah." My eyes were indeed opening. I was beginning to see how thoroughly this confederacy was doing its work. It was on my tongue to ask Christy a probing question; but I desisted. Instead, said I, "But you know, Mr Muldoon, England is still a power."

"She was a power a while ago," he answered, "when a handful of Boer farmers defied the whole strength of her—ay, an' only missed beatin' her by a hair's breadth. Now, when she's crouchin', what d'ye imagine is her power against the whole of Ireland? Ireland, I say. Irishmen, I'm tellin' ye; not poor ignorant divils of Boers. Chut! What can she do? She can't spare a man. There's not three whole regiments this side the Channel, half the

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barracks are empty, and the last thing we're troubled with nowadays, thank God, is the face of a policeman. The fleet's tied, the army's tied, she's crouchin' on the cliffs. Do? She's powerless. We've but to lift our heads an'——" Once more Christy waved a hand and left the rest to me.

I sat frowning at the fire. This was the old Hillside note, boastful, disdainful, reckless; a note which gave me proof that, however wise its leaders, the confederacy was yet a league of hot-headed Irishmen. Not so, not by empty words of scorn and disparagement, not by any lifting of heads and waving of hands, were victories achieved and nations made. Still, that was not for me to say; just now I had other concerns. Turning quick in my chair, an Irishman myself for all my moralising, I raised my hat. "Boys," cried I, "God save Ireland."

"Amen," came back to me through the smoke, and from Christy behind me: "Then you're with us, Mr Shaw?"

I turned, fervour cold in me. "Oh, surely, Mr Muldoon—why surely." I paused. "Tell me, what is it you want of me?"

"Your help. You're just the kind o' man we're searchin' for. There's some already—ay, a good many—but not enough. We want leaders, chaps who have seen service, boys like yourself that have rambled about the world. You've only got to say the word an'——" For the third time Christy waved his hand. But I wanted something more definite than that.

"What, Mr Muldoon?" said I. "Suppose me to have said the word?"

"Say it first," said Christy, wily as a grizzled fox.

"That would be jumping in the blackest dark."

"Then jump—jump, sir." I saw Christy glance across at Moran, saw Moran nod his head. "You'll jump into just this, Mr Shaw: the leadership of the Armoy commando."

So! Without answering I leant forward and sat smiling at the fire. Leader of the Armoy commando? Another Cronje, or De Wet, or Botha, leading my ragged Hillsideers to glory through native boreens, sweeping in the Protestants, driving in the cattle, doing desperately from the backs of Irish ditches? Here indeed was a glorious opportunity, the crowning chance of my luckless career. How often I had burned for glory, how far and how often had wandered in its quest; how recklessly had I striven, how completely had failed. And now, at last, here in poor down-trodden Ireland, here in the long-forsaken country of my birth, behold the glorious chance in sight! Leader of the Armoy commando? Captain of my Hillside troop, of Pat and Ned and James in their tattered corduroys, of Moran in his coat of frieze, of the sleek and portly Mr Muldoon in his homespun tweeds? Dictator of Ulster, mayhap; Commander-in-chief of the Republic, maybe; Protector acclaimed, who knew, of this Ireland that I had freed? It was glorious. Is it wonder that, despite the glory, I sat leaning forward and smiling at the fire?

Presently I rose, turned about upon the hearth, and looked at Christy. "You'll give me time to think this over, Mr Muldoon?"

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"Aw, to be sure," answered Christy, and rose also. "Man dear, take your own time. But"—and Christy looked knowing—"I wouldn't be too long, I'm thinkin'; for things may happen before another moon's on the turn."

"I understand. Well, I'll be before the moon." I took a step towards the door; then turned slowly. "I'm just wondering, Mr Muldoon, whether you're wise to trust me with all this."

"Are ye?" said Christy. "An' why, now?"

"Oh, for several reasons. Suppose, for one, that I *was* an English spy and reported your information to the English Government?"

"Ay." Christy stood pondering, his feet spraddled, one hand thrust into his waistcoat, the other stroking his chin. Presently he twisted his head and looked at me askance, his narrow grey eyes a-gleam with meaning. "Well," he answered, "supposin' the English Government, as ye call it, believed ye, I misdoubt ye know the value of your own life."

"Ah. Is that meant for a threat, Mr Muldoon?"

"It's meant for nothin', Mr Shaw. It's just one way of tellin' truth."

"I know." A minute I stood considering; then buttoned my jacket and stepped towards the door. "Well, good-night to you, Mr Muldoon. Good-night, boys."

The boys rose, shuffled back their stools and watched me pass. "Good-night, sir," they answered; but Moran was fumbling with the bolt before Christy spoke. "Safe home, Mr Shaw; an' we'll be lookin' for ye again."

Something in his voice, a note of command, of

warning, made me look back. He was standing before the fire, head thrust forward, legs spraddled, one hand hidden in his waistcoat, the other bent behind him—the very attitude, as I live, in which painters are wont to depict the great Napoleon.

CHAPTER III

COALS OF FIRE

THAT night I lay thinking till cock-crow ; slept through adventurous dreams ; woke to renewed thinking in the broad light of morning. Was I awake or was I dreaming still ? Had Christy really spoken in the smoke and had I really heard him ; or were he and his revelations only shadows of the night, figments of restless sleep ?

No ; they were real. Out in Armoy, Christy even then was busying his Napoleonic self in sober daylight, was shaving maybe, or eating his breakfast, or driving in the cows ; and Moran was there in his Sunday clothes, and Pat, and Ned, and all the rest ; and the hills there beyond the window were the hills I had trod last night, the hills in which more than stones lay buried, the hills which soon would echo the tramp of the Armoy commando.

Would it tramp ? Yes, it would. Would those peaceful hills soon be the scene of stirring deeds ? Yes, they would. Was the sun to shine one morning soon on an insurgent Ireland, a land seething in rebellion from shore to shore, a land proclaiming its freedom and defending it against the might of England ? Yes, on that the sun would shine. I knew it. Great happenings were in train. That

spring morning was brooding over fateful things ; was working deep in myself, quickening me from dreams to stir of action. In the night I had changed. No longer did I smile at myself, as a while ago in Moran's kitchen ; in full seriousness I lay contemplating the new man that a night had made. Why, if the hills were to stir, should not I help in the stirring ? Why, if Ireland was to be free, should not I strive in the freeing ? I was an Irishman. I was an adventurer. No one in the broad world cared a straw for my worthless carcase. Chance and consequence I valued at a brass farthing. If I failed 'twere but one failure the more ; did I succeed, then would success be all the more glorious. And, in either case, what sport there would be, what riot of commotion and bliss of good living.

"By heaven," cried I springing from my bed, "I have half a mind to give Christy the word. I'll—I'll—— But easy, Jamie Shaw," said I to myself in a minute ; "go warily, my future leader of the Armoy commando. Leave things to chance to-day. Go out prospecting, my impulsive boy. Walk about those fateful hills. Study those conspiring Hillsiders. Go and see your Leah Hynes ; maybe she has a word that will affect your destiny. Leave it to Leah," said I to myself ; and myself answered, "Right, Jamie, my lad."

It was a glorious morning, suave and inspiring ; but through it I went soberly, thoughtful, observant. Not only I had changed in the night, but the whole aspect of things. What, some hours gone, had been mere hills, fields, ditches, now lay in the sunshine clad with a new significance. It was like walking across the scene of an impending battle ; say like walking

over the Surrey Downs with the French landed at Dover. I found myself leading imaginary troops—the Hillsiders, let us say—through possible mazes of strategy. What a country for subtle manœuvring, its hills so many natural fortresses trenched from foot to crown, its face thick with tempting ambushes. Talk of kopje and donga : why, South Africa was a playground compared with Gorteen and Armoy, Bilboa and the wilds of Drumhill. In that field I could hide a troop, on that hill defy an army. Imagine the King's forces caught napping just there, Lackan lake one side, the mountain beyond, Armoy bog lurking behind. Then the ranges above Thrasna river, the barren heights of Bilboa, the woods along the lake with Hillsiders hiding there. But enough. The King's troops would never fire a shot in Fermanagh. England, as Christy had said, could spare never a man. She was in the toils of destiny ; and from Bunn town to Lismahee the Armoy commando—my commando—might rove at will.

And these Hillsiders I met, returning from mass in their smoke-scented tweeds, stepping gravely along with wives and daughters ; how changed these were in the shine of that Sabbath morning. Assume that every coat held a sworn conspirator ; and say if you would not have found that significant ? So innocent they looked, so bovine and pastoral ; so black with secrets they were at heart. I felt like taking them each by the collar and saying : " Look here, my son, that sheepish air doesn't become you. I know you, Ned O'Hara ; I see your wolf's heart. Come, sir, what were you doing last night ? What did the priest tell you this morning ? What innocent talk were you having with your neighbours over there ?

Where is the gun hid, Ned, my boy? Tell me, *acushla*, when the great day is due?"

But I did not take them by the collar; only watched them as they passed, wondering inwardly what thoughts they had, what hopes, what designs? In another fortnight, or less, where would they be, and what would they be at, these lamblike Hillsiders? Should I be leading them? Could they be restrained, they with the hatred of centuries black in their blood and centuries of oppression crying to them for vengeance? Great powers, the fearful possibilities that brooded in that Sabbath sunshine! And I knew. I knew.

So all the morning I wandered; and late in the afternoon sighted Emo, near which is Rhamus Castle and wild Bilboa lying beyond Thrasna river. I was tired now, wearied of observing and planning; so, partly because I wanted rest, partly because I wished to talk with the Master, chiefly because I wanted a word with Jan Farmer, the Master's son and my enemy in love, I turned at Stonegate along the Curleck road, and came soon to the big white house standing among the firs on the crest of Emo hill.

A winding avenue led from the road to the house; and in this, seated upon the ditch smoking and reading a newspaper, I came upon Jan. He must have heard the gate clash, must have heard my foot upon the gravel; but even when I stopped before him Jan gave me no heed. I waited silently a minute; then, somewhat nettled, "Good afternoon, Mr Farmer," said I.

At that Jan lowered his newspaper and looked at me across it, his eyes calm and unfriendly, a mocking smile on his handsome face. "Good evenin' to your-

self, Mr Shaw," he answered. "It's strange to see you these parts."

"Is it?" I stood regarding him, not favourably. "By that you mean, I suppose, that I'm not welcome?"

"Maybe. You know best, Mr Shaw." Jan folded his newspaper, yawned and leant an elbow on the ditch. "It's not for me to bid you welcome; but himself's inside yonder." He wagged his head towards the house, stretched his great limbs on the ditch, rested head on hand and closed his eyes. "Away into him, like a man, an' let me sleep."

This was insolence. I felt like plucking the lout from his lair and teaching him manners. But why soil my hands upon such clay? Contempt was good enough for him. So restraining myself, I turned on my heel and faced the house. "Well, sleep then," said I across a shoulder; "but be awake, Mr Farmer, next time I see you for I want a word with you."

"You can have two if you're mannerly," said Jan, opening his eyes; "an', if you're not—Oh, I'll be here, Mr Shaw, an' I'll strive to be awake." And Jan yawned again.

In the front parlour that looks upon the lawn I found the Master (every one in Emo called him that) seated at the table in an elbow chair and reading in a Bible. He was a man of powerful build, hale and vigorous despite his sixty years, with grizzled hair, shaven lip and chin, and a strong weather-beaten face. His whole aspect gave you the impression of power. He looked masterful. His eyes were deep and sapient; and behind them were unplumbed depths of wisdom and knowledge. No rogue could sit placid before him. His laughter was the heartiest I ever

heard. You could trust him eternally. No man knew Ireland better, or its people, none saw clearer what lay the other side of its hills ; and it was to test that knowledge that I now was come.

He greeted me, asked me to sit down, laid his spectacles on the Bible ; twisted round his chair and sat half facing me, knees crossed and head resting on a hand. We spoke of many things—of my wanderings, of local events, of markets and cattle and horses—presently, and at my suggesting, of Ireland and its condition. I had been long away, I had great interest in my country's welfare, no man knew better than he how things were going ; what, asked I, was his opinion of the present condition of Irish affairs ?

He answered at length ; cautiously, I thought, and with unusual indecision. Affairs were unsettled, he said. The law was slothfully administered. England had listened too patiently to the demands of agitators, had given too much, was inclined to give too much even now. In his own time things had moved at alarming speed. He had seen land acts passed by the score ; all giving, giving—and giving most freely, he considered, to those who were least grateful. He had seen the landlords go down one by one, till now only a few of the biggest—his own, Lord Louth, among them—were left ; the few who clung to their estates because titles without land were empty. This disappearance of the gentry had, he was of opinion, left Ireland the poorer ; and, so far as he could see, not all of what had come in their place had improved it. To be sure it seemed improved. Land nearly everywhere was as good as free. Education was free. Taxes were light. Every county and district had its

own local government. Trade was better. Markets were better. The great co-operative systems were a success. Less went out of the country nowadays, and less came in—a sign, he thought, of prosperity. Crime was abating. Emigration was not increasing. People knew more, thought more, were soberer and quieter.

“But here’s the point,” said the Master, “are the people really better and more contented as their own masters than they were as the tenants of masters? Are the Catholics free now, or only the slaves of their religion? Are the Protestants the same men since they lost leaders and masters, place and power? Won’t bad times bring bad doings again? Won’t the professional agitators soon be yelping once more? For centuries we were on top—we the Protestants—now we’re not on top, even if we’re not below; but do you think *they* won’t use their new power, if they get the chance, to get us below?”

I sat looking at the table, pretending reflection. Surely the man knew more than he said. “Well, Mr Farmer,” said I, “perhaps it might be strange if they wouldn’t.”

“Strange, you say.” He smiled grimly. “Man, if they had the chance they’d walk upon us, and they’d cut every throat that didn’t belong to them. Oh, they’re black to the very heart!”

I knew that; but Christy had spoken differently about the throats. “Ah, but come, Mr Farmer,” said I; “be generous to them. Perhaps, did they get the chance, they’d heap coals of fire upon your head.”

He laughed at that, not mirthfully. “Ay, by God would they,” he answered, “and upon the roof.”

"So you think, Mr Farmer, that all England's giving—her money and legislation and all that—hasn't really won the hearts of Irishmen?"

"Of some," he answered. "The rest have just taken all they could get and kept their hearts inside them. A united Ireland—the Protestant wolf lying down with the Catholic lamb—the priest shaking hands with the parson? Bah!" cried the Master. "That kind of talk makes me sick. I tell ye the unity is only skin deep. They'd cut our throats to-morrow."

Well that was to be seen. "And do you think they'll ever get the chance?" I questioned.

"H'm." He sat drumming his fingers upon the table. "They've had their chances," said he in a while. "Please God they may have no more."

"Ah, but what do you think?" said I. He did not answer. "Don't you think they might make chances even now?" Still he kept silent. "Come," I went on, bending over the table; "don't you think, if they liked, they could make chances even now?"

Then he looked at me, straight and fixedly beneath his heavy eyebrows. "What do you mean?" said he.

I drew back. "Oh, nothing," I answered; "except that just now England is fully occupied and—and—" I paused. "Well, I've been thinking that maybe the Boers have taught the Irish a lesson."

His eyes were still upon me, reading, guessing. "A lesson," he asked. "What lesson?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's only a fancy of mine. But—perhaps—Well," said I, "one lesson might be the power of fifty thousand men holding the hills with rifles. Another might be the weakness of England."

I paused there, and looked at him. He sat watch-

ing me intently, his eyes troubled in the depths of them, suspicion of myself quick in them. I twisted in my chair. "Oh, it's only a notion," said I, "only a notion. Maybe," and I glanced at him, "you've had that notion yourself, Mr Farmer?" He did not answer, only sat watching, watching. "You know, it's an idea that might come to any thinking man." Still he did not speak. "England is weak, you know, and her hands are full." He nodded. "And fifty thousand men well armed and led might do much in a country like this." I waved an arm towards the hills that stood ranked beyond the window; then leant over the table. "Come," said I, "honestly isn't there something in what I say?"

"Perhaps there's more in what you don't say," was his answer. "Tell me, Mr Shaw, have you been spreading this idea of yours about Armoy? Or did your friends in Armoy give it to you?"

I met his questions boldly, searching though they were and deep with knowledge. "No," said I. "My friends in Armoy, as you call them, and myself have their own business to attend to. You're not accusing me, I hope?"

"That's not my business either," he said. "But let me tell you this, Mr Shaw: talk like yours isn't wanted these parts. What I think I keep to myself; take a friend's advice and keep yours to yourself."

"I know," said I. "Well, that's easily done. All the same, Mr Farmer, I'd like your opinion of my notion. Man to man, now, don't you think there's something in what I say?"

"I think nothing," he answered.

"Ah, but you do," said I; "and you know. Look

here. Haven't you noticed yourself that something is moving here among the hills? Don't you know that people are saying more than prayers around the hearthstones, and hearing more at mass on Sundays? Eh?"

He would not answer, but to me his silence was answer in full. He had noticed. He did know. I rose and pushed back my chair. "Well," said I, "I'm sorry we can't make the cat jump this afternoon, Mr Farmer; but that I know is my fault. I'm thankful for what you've told me, and I'm sorry you distrust me—why, Heaven only knows." I was facing the window, and in sight of a great tract of country-side, of the Bilboa Hills, of Rhamus and its ruined castle beyond the valley, of Lackan running into Armoy, and Armoy into Drumhill, and Drumhill shadowed by the long hazy mountain. "Surely," said I, half turning and pointing through the window, "you know I love all that as much as you love it, and wish peace upon it as much as you wish it. Simply because I ask honest questions, am I for that to be distrusted?"

Perhaps he did not distrust me. Perhaps he knew me—no difficult matter just then—better than I knew myself. Perhaps he believed me. He answered by rising from his chair and moving towards the door. And taking the hint, I bade him Good-bye and went.

In the avenue Jan was waiting for me, awake and bending over his knees. At sound of my foot he rose and together we walked towards the road. Near the gate he threw back his shoulders and drew a long breath. "Man, but it's the great weather," he said.

"I feel this minute as if I could jump over the moon."

"Do you?" said I. "Well, you'll have to wait a while for your moon, Jan. By the time you've jumped I'll be seeing a star beyond there." And I nodded towards Clackan and the home of Leah.

"Will you, Jamie boy," answered Jan. "Sure I thought all your shinin' stars were in the Armoy boreens. An' what now would any star of yours be doin' in Clackan beyond?"

"Oh, waiting for me. You've seen it yourself, Jan, my son—a while ago. But now the moon will have to satisfy you, I'm afraid."

"Is that so, faith?" Jan laughed in his easy way. "Troth, an' it's yourself is poetical this spring evenin', Mr Shaw. You remind me of a friend I knew once, a chap called Harry Thomson. Would this be the word I was to hear if I kept awake?"

"Partly," said I; "but plain prose might suit your intelligence better, Mr Farrer. So I'll tell you that beyond in Clackan you're wanted no longer, and I'll expect you to come interfering no more. Is that plain enough?"

"It's as plain as yourself, Mr Shaw, so far as it goes. Couldn't you put Amen to it?"

I stopped in the road; and Jan stopped also, thumbs hooked in his waistcoat and eyes askance upon me. "I could," said I. "Does this spell it? To-night I'm going to ask Leah Hynes to marry me."

Jan nodded. "Well?" drawled he.

"That's Amen for you. I thought you'd like to know." I took a step; stopped and turned. "I thought it might save you trouble—and harder than

trouble perhaps—if you had that word from myself in good time. You understand ? ”

Jan nodded again. “ I’m tryin’,” he said in his bovine way. “ But go on. What has all this to do with me ? ”

“ Nothing in the world—now. But it had, I think, some weeks ago.”

“ Had it ? ” Jan stood looking at the road. “ To be sure, now.” Slowly he raised his head, looked about the fields, turned again to me. “ Well, I wish you good luck, Jamie ; but——”

He shook his head and laughed. “ Man, Jamie, all your travels in the world have taught you little. You’re as simple as—as—who now ? Ay, as simple as Christy Muldoon that thinks he has only to cock his ould blunderbuss at a Protestant to make him fling up his hands. You’re acquainted with Christy, I’m hearin’ ? ”

I stood amazed. What did the man know ? Pooh. ’Twas only guessing. I affected anger. “ To blazes,” said I, “ with your Christy Muldoon. What the devil, sir, has he to do with me ? ”

“ God knows, Jamie,” answered Jan. “ But look here, my decent man, let me advise you to keep your black countenance for them Armoy stars, an’ not to trouble me with it any more. I’m not partial to your kind, Jamie, an’ sight of you makes my foot itch. If you were a man I’d kick you ; as you’re not I’ll just wait till you grow to be one. Think o’ that, Jamie, this evenin’ when you’re star-huntin’,” said Jan and turned from me.

But I was wrath, lashed by his contempt and insolence. I caught him by a shoulder. “ By the Lord, Jan Farmer,” I shouted, “ you’ll pay for this.”

He twisted away. "Take your rebel's hand off my coat," he said, "an' take your blasphemous tongue to them that like it."

"You'll pay," I shouted. "By God, you'll pay."

"It'll be honest cash when I do," answered Jan; then caught his thumbs in his waistcoat and sauntered off.

I was far on the way towards Clackan, going round by Kilpad and the bog-marsh, before anger died in me and I was able to look calmly at what lay behind the Master's hints and Jan's open scorn. Did they know anything? Had they suspicion of what was coming? Yes, they knew something and suspected much; but what—what? Was it only the knowledge which any thinking Irishman might have, the suspicion that every Irishman, whatever his creed, breathed like the air? Or was it real knowledge, real suspicion born of that knowledge? Why had the Master hinted? Why did Jan mention Christy Muldoon, and call myself rebel to my face? Rebel? Why even to myself I had never spoken the word! Yet—yet. . . .

Oh, I gave it up. Ireland was still its old perplexing self, its people still the same bewildering mixture of light and darkness—simple, yet deep as midnight, elusive, unknowable. They knew nothing, yet knew everything, and the unborn secrets of a man they whispered round every hearthstone.

"I give it up. Christy must decide. But, by heaven, I'll be even with Jan Farmer yet," said I and went striding over the darkening fields.

It was dark when I reached Leah's home, nestling on the hillside among its apple trees and poplars. The front of the house was dark but a light shone

through the kitchen window ; so crossing the yard I knocked on the door, lifted the latch and stepped in. Round the wide hearth sat John Hynes, Susan his wife, and two or three neighbours ; but Leah was not there. They welcomed me. I sat down, lighted my pipe and joined in the talk.

Conversation was idle at first ; presently I began to lead it, soon had it raging wild round national affairs. Here was no secrecy, no reserve. I had but to tap the Orange drum and all was fervour, but to mention the Pope and the company was ablaze. In all the world was only one man and he an Ulsterman, only one religion and that Protestant, only one blackguard and he your Irish Papist. Where had I been that I thought Orangeism dead, and True Blues silenced, and the great cause tramped out ? Dead ? Tut ! Never since Billy crossed the Boyne were True Blues stronger or more united, the cause more flourishing. The lodges were crowded. Last twelfth of July the drums would deafen you. Man to man the boys stood ranked, ready always to give the blackguards defiance. They and their Leagues and Associations, their Free land and schools, their Councils, their Home industries, and a lot these had done to change them ! Change ? Nothing could change them so long as their blood ran black. They were born rebels and rebels they'd die. Till Ireland was clear of the vermin Ireland would never be herself and True Blues never satisfied. . . .

Afraid of them ? Great King, the talk of the man ! Protestants no better now than Papists ? Heavenly hour, the ignorance of the man ; and him travelled over the world ! What was that ? A rising, the man said ; a rebellion, he said ? Haw, haw ! Did anyone

ever hear the like? They to rise, them scarecrows! Aw, 'deed ay. Let them plot; 'twas their nature. Suppose they were drilling? Did that matter to True Blues?

"Look here, Mr Shaw," said John Hynes at last, bending towards me across the hearth, "your travels about the world'll excuse your ignorance; but let me tell ye this to your private ear, an' consider it well. In these parts we fear no man livin' an' call no man master; an' all rebels we'll shoot if ever their day comes. We scorn them, sir; an' we give them defiance; an' may their day be soon. Ye hear that?" asked John, and pushed his face, flaming above its tangled beard, heavy with hate and bigotry, towards me. "Ye hear that, Mr Shaw?"

"I do," answered I; then, till Leah came in from the milking, sat contrasting John with Christy, and the Master with both. Strange that three such types should spring from the same country-side; each so different from the other in appearance, mind, spirit, each representative in his way of a class as distinct in all things except name and speech as any three nations in the world. But the Master's class was small; whilst Christy's and John's were big; and it was between these the struggle would be. Would there be a struggle? What would be its result? In my own mind, despite John's gasconade, was no doubt of the result.

Leah hung her milking porringer on the wall, took off her coarse apron, drew up a stool to the hearth and sat down; and with that fervour died among the company and in myself did seriousness vanish like mists before good sunshine. How sit nursing black thought

in sight of that blithe presence, in hearing of that merry tongue? She warmed me like draughts of generous wine, stirred me as spring breezes stir. Only four weeks had passed since the day I had first seen her in Bunn town, carrying her market basket along the side-walk ; not ten times had I spoken to her or heard her speak ; yet there sat I as deep in love as man ever was. What so pleasing did I find in her ; wherein did she differ from all other women I had seen in all the world? I know not. Words cannot tell what I found ; nor can words of mine describe herself. She was only a hillside colleen, she was not clever, or beautiful, in speech and manner she was rustic, plain, her accomplishments were but pastoral, her graces homely, a hundred women I had seen excelled her in this and that ; yet in herself did she excel them all. She was fresh as spring flowers ; filled with the strength and health of the hills. She was honest as the day, simple in mind and heart as a child. Her laugh was the merriest I ever heard. Her voice was like a bird's for sweetness, rich and full. Her grey eyes made me think of the dawn. I looked at her cheeks and thought of apples ripening in the sun. Her hair was raven black ; her forehead low and wide, her lips full and red. Not in the wide world had I seen a woman who bore herself better—upright, lithe, free—and she sat by the hearthstone gracious as any lady born. That night she wore a black gown, with crochet work enlaced with yellow ribbon round wrists and neck, and a silver brooch at her throat.

For a while we sat talking and jesting ; then of a sudden I rose. " Well," said I, " it's time for home. Good-night, John, and you, Mrs Hynes ; and thank

you for your crack." Crossing I opened the door, and stood by the threshold. "By Jove, what a night it is. Come here, Miss Leah, till you see." I heard laughter at that (indeed it was an artless excuse); but it brought Leah to my side. "Put on your hat," I whispered; "I want to speak with you."

"Ah, no. Sure not to-night. Ah, no."

"I'll wait for you in the yard. I must speak to you. Come."

"Ah, no. . . . Well, I want no hat," said Leah, and pulled the door behind her.

Together we crossed the yard, down a lane overhung with bending apple trees, and coming to a gate stopped by it, I leaning upon the rail, Leah standing beside me. For a minute we said nothing; then: "Isn't it a night, Leah?" said I.

"Ah, it's lovely. Sure it makes one wish the year was all springtime."

"Yes, it does. It's what the poets call witching. . . . It's a fateful night for me, Leah."

"Is it? There's — there's nothing happened, I hope?"

"No. Not yet. Listen to me, Leah." I turned, with my back against the rail, my face to hers. "I've got to make a big decision soon. I can't tell you what it is, but you can help me to make it. My whole future and the future of others, my life maybe and the lives of other, depend upon it—depend upon you, Leah."

She stood with folded hands looking steadily at me, her hair so black above her forehead, her eyes so bright, her lips so tempting. "On me?" she said, wonderingly.

"Yes, on you. A word from you may alter everything. If you said Yes I might do this; if you said No I might do that. Will you decide for me, Leah?"

There was passion in my voice, I suppose. She moved back a step and dropped her eyes. "Ah, I dunno. Is it me? Sure I can say nothing." She looked up. "What can I say, Mr Shaw, if I don't know?"

"But you can know." I stepped towards her. "It's just this, Leah; I want you to say if you'll marry me."

I saw her flinch back as from a blow, and her hands fell apart, and her eyes leapt to mine for an instant and sank again. But passion was strong in me, reckless, compelling. "It's true, Leah; it's true. I love you with all my heart. You're the one woman for me in the world. For you I'd go to the ends of the earth. Never have I seen your like or equal. I value nothing in life this minute but you. Listen to me, Leah," I cried, seeing her shrink from me again; and feverishly went on. She had but to say one word and life was changed for me. Together we should go hand in hand on through beautiful days. I should care for her so much. Somewhere we should settle down and be happy as happy could be. "Leah, Leah," I cried; "everything rests with you. God knows, I'm nothing to be proud of; but such as I am here I stand asking you to give me yourself. Will you, Leah?"

It was a fateful moment, bigger with fate than she knew. Did she give herself, then was Christy answered at once; did she not give herself then——

"Will you, Leah?" I cried. "Ah, my dear, my dear."

She stood looking at the ground, so that I could only see her hair and a whiteness below it, and a hand raised to her cheek. I stretched my arms and cried again. She looked up. "What right have ye to ask me this?" she said.

"None—none except that I love you, Leah."

"Have I ever given ye any encouragement?" she said. "Ever by word or deed?"

"Never, Leah. It's just yourself, your own self."

"Then—" She looked at me boldly, with a lift of the head and a quick bracing of her figure. "I think you're answered, Mr Shaw."

"You say No?"

"I'll say it if it's any comfort to ye."

"You care nothing for me at all?"

"Nothing at all," answered Leah, slowly and firmly. "Nothing at all."

"But I can wait. Ah, let me wait, Leah. Give me a man's chance."

"If ye waited till judgment day," came the sentence, every word of it dropping harsh as from the tongue of doom, "'twould be all the same. It'd be cruel to tell ye any other word."

"Cruel?" I flung out my arms towards that shadowy figure, with its pale face and the brooch shining at its throat like some star of hopelessness. "Great heavens, could there be a crueller thing in the world than for a man to love and be repulsed, to love and get no chance?"

"It's just truth," said Leah.

"But why, why? Am I worth no consideration?"

"To me you're worth nothing, Mr Shaw. I can say no more an' I can say no less."

That was decisive. I might go to Christy. Jan Farmer had beaten me. Jan? Thought of him, of his contempt and insolence, of his triumph of possession, lashed me to anger. "Oh, I know," I cried. "I'm worth nothing because that yokel has deluded you. Your Jan Farmer! Your clodhopper of a Jan!"

Leah did not answer; but I heard her breath come quick. I stepped close to her. "You'd throw me over for him. That's your choice. Look at the man," said I, foolish with defeat; "look at the man you fling away for sake of a hillside clown. Look!"

Leah waited a minute; then drew herself up. "I'm lookin'," said she, scorn ringing in her voice, pride lifting her head. "My opinion is that the same God never made you an' Jan Farmer." She turned at that; but I was mad and I caught her by an arm.

"By God, he won't have you. I'll make you. I'll make you." I tried to clasp her to me; but she twisted free.

"You dare," she panted. "Ah, if Jan was here!"

Then all suddenly reason came back to me and I stood ashamed. "Forgive me, Leah," I said.

She did not answer.

"Forgive me, Leah. I'm so sorry."

She said nothing.

"It's because I love you so, Leah. Can't you forgive me?"

For answer she turned away and slowly went back along the lane, between the hedges and under the

bending apple trees ; and seeing her go, lost to me, lost, my devil leaped black in me again.

"I'll have you yet," I shouted. "I'll have you yet, and I'll have your Jan. Wait ; just wait," I shouted ; then turned in the lane, fit leader then of the reddest commando. 'Twas Christy now. 'Twas diversion now. And might Jan Farmer's paying day be near.

CHAPTER IV

THEIR CAPTAIN BOLD

THAT night I lay awake again, brooding and thinking. Next day I wandered about the hills, brooding still ; in the evening went headlong through Armoy and gave Christy my word. He took my hand. "I knew it," he said. "My compliments, captain Shaw ; an' you've chose your time like a prophet. There's a meetin' this very night. Step out with me this minute, an' clinch the bargain."

I stood considering, my hand in Christy's. It was not yet too late. Thought of Jan Farmer decided me. "Step out, Christy my son," said I ; "the captain's with you. And God prosper us."

"Amen," said Christy. And together we stepped out.

As we crossed the fields I told Christy about my talk with the Master, and with Jan and John Hynes. He only scoffed. "Have no fear," said he. "They're of no account. They can guess but they know nothin'."

"Ah, but the Master does know, Christy. What if *they* are getting ready too ?"

"Let them. All the better maybe. But they're not. They despise us too much an' they're blind as

young puppies. We've moved; they've stood still. We're doin'; they're only talkin'."

"Yes, but the Master, Christy? He didn't talk. Perhaps he's doing too."

"He can do nothin', I say. Th' others are too ignorant to listen to him. There's not ten men in the county like him; not five that think with him. An' if he knew all, an' told all, the Government 'd only call him a fool. Man, they're all asleep. Wait till ye see; wait till ye see."

"But Jan called me a rebel, Christy. What did he mean? How did he know?"

"It's the first word on every Protestant's tongue. It's a legacy come down to them. ' Jan knows nothin' —'cept that you're in his way."

"And John Hynes knows nothing, meant nothing?"

"John an' his kind know now what they always knew, an' they're bletherin' now as they've blethered for centuries. They've trampled on us so long, they think they can keep trampling. They imagine the name of King William an' a bang on the Orange drum are still powers in the land, things good enough to scatter all the vermin upon the hills. It's their nature; it's their teachin.' In God's world is no creature so narrow an' bigoted as your Ulster Protestant. He'll take all an' give nothin'. Heaven was made for him only, and hell is waitin' for all not wearin' his black coat. The poor deluded creature! Dear knows, I pity him. He knows no better. He'd be a good man if somebody'd lead him, an' he'd be led; but no one will lead an' he'd never follow. . . . So his day has come."

"You think so, Christy? You really do?"

"It's dawnin'," he answered ; and I asked no more.

Presently men began to overtake us on the road ; swiftly they glanced at us, said a word in Irish, and hurried on. "The boys gátherin'," said Christy. Further on we passed men standing in couples by the hedges, two this side, two that, who eyed us narrowly and took the word from Christy. "The outposts," said he. Soon we struck down a by-road, upon which were many sentinels and down which groups went hurrying, and came to a big slated house that stood beyond a whitethorn hedge. At the gate words passed, and again at the door ; it opened and we walked straight into Armoy schoolroom. "Free education," whispered Christy as we passed the threshold. I nodded a reply. We crossed the tiled floor, Christy giving salutation in Irish, and took our places on a form by the great unshuttered windows.

It was a large square room, set with desks, blackboards, presses, a rostrum facing the desks, the white-washed wall hung with diagrams and maps—the map of England among them. Hanging lamps and candles in sconces lighted the room ; tobacco smoke filled it ; in the rostrum sat the schoolmaster, England's chosen instructor of Ireland's youth ; in the desks sat the Armoy commando, fathers and brothers all of the children who sat there every day taking England's gifts of knowledge. A low noise of conversation and of shuffling feet went up. Many curious eyes were turned upon myself, and in the rostrum the schoolmaster sat watching me through a cloud of smoke. At intervals the door opened and men came in, slouching awkwardly over the tiles and

blinking in the light. Soon the desks were filled. A shout from the door brought in the sentinels. Christy crossed and spoke to the schoolmaster; then thumped the rostrum lid and turned.

"Boys," said he, "I've brought ye a new recruit. He's a man we want. He's a man I've proved. He's a man ye all know by name, an' a man ye can all trust. He'll lead ye to glory. He'll do powers at head of the Armoy commando. Boys," shouted Christy, striking his attitude of the great Napoleon, "rise up in your places an' give welcome to captain Shaw. *Hip-hip-hurroo!*

It was a deafening shout that arose, a skirl that must have stirred the outposts on the hills. Hats were waved, arms whirled, a hundred eyes turned fiercely on me. *Hurroo-hurroo-hurroo*, went the skirls; then ceased, and swelled again as rising I whirled my hat shouting, "Ireland for ever, boys. Here's to the Armoy commando. *Hip-hip—*" And the rafters cracked.

Quiet followed that. The boys settled comfortably upon the creaking desks. Pipes were filled and lit. In dead silence I went to the rostrum and took the oath of allegiance, repeating after Christy the simple form by which I vowed myself to Ireland, my life to the Cause, and obedience to my leaders that were. "Captain, now you're one of ourselves," said Christy. I bowed to my fate; then went back to the window and heard the schoolmaster call the roll of my Commando.

My Commando?

Well, so be it.

The roll was long—some four hundred names in

all, including those of the duties outside—and as each man answered, raising his hand the while like any schoolboy, I made note of name and face, fixing both upon my memory. Soldiers of fortune have a way (and need), I think, of such recording ; certainly I have, and it is sure that at end of the roll-call I could not only have recalled it from memory but could have named any man in the room and given quick reading of his character. Here and there I might have erred : with Christy, say, or the school-master : but speaking broadly the estimate I made that night of my Commando was not untrue. Nor was it, I may say, unfavourable. Black sheep there were, of course, faces that I marked at once in glaring red, eyes that looked out of black depths ; but the flock as a flock was sound. These men, rough though they were and ungainly, worn with hunger and toil, were genuine. They had flung off the yoke of slavery, had sight now of a dawn of knowledge. On their faces—such different faces from the old sullen faces I remembered—was a light of hope blent with the shadow of impending things. They had found themselves. They meant business. They would make good soldiers. They would follow me loyally and well. Might I prove a worthy leader, prompt in command, powerful in control, ready always to keep down the fires of hatred which smouldered within them. Ah, those fires, unquenchable through centuries of oppression, now smouldering low ; how I dreaded them ! Only stern trampling, I knew, would keep them down in the days that were near. Leaders, wise leaders, patient leaders, these always had been Ireland's need, these were still her need ; and did

they fail in the coming time, then must her days be black.

The roll called, the minutes of last meeting read and signed, the times of future meetings together with the date and place of squad and commando drill announced by Christy ; the schoolmaster pocketed his pipe, pulled near the blackboard, and unrolling a map of Ireland and one of South Africa, proceeded to give us a lesson on what I may call the geography of Ireland as a seat of modern warfare. He was a knowing man, was Michael Slane the schoolmaster, quick and shrewd of tongue, not without humour and a gift of satire, possessing also the power (cultivated doubtless in some National training college) of clear exposition. He was a short lean man, black of countenance and very ugly ; his face narrow as a hatchet, with outstanding ears, long upper lip and beady eyes flashing below a wrinkled forehead. Michael I had marked already as a black sheep. Himself and his ways, his rasping brogue and petty witticisms, took me little ; but soon I forgot these things and sat following his discourse with eagerness. The man knew. All the physical peculiarities of South Africa, all the difficulties it presented to military operations, its likeness to Ireland as a seat of war and its enormous differences in climate, size, position, were at his finger ends ; and to us, by aid of map and blackboard, were well expounded. We saw Ireland, saw South Africa ; saw the likeness of this to that, the difference of that from this. That the Boers did, so could Irishmen. This the Boers could not do because their country was not Ireland, and this Irishmen could do because their country was Ireland.

"Boys," shouted Michael, "Ireland's as like South Africa in some ways as two straws, and as unlike in most as two potatoes; but potatoes or straws are all one to Irishmen—what we can't eat we'll thatch the house with."

A roar of laughter followed this cryptic saying, but Michael's face never relaxed; turning to the blackboard he wiped out a row of figures with his coat-sleeve and wrote in its place:

"What Ireland has not got she can take or do without."

But Michael was versatile in his knowledge; he had a new student that night; my evident interest in his discourse gave him encouragement; soon he had flung geography to its arid winds and was discoursing free. We had a description of the late war, marvellous in its vividness and accuracy. We had an account of the Boers (with analogies, after the manner of Christy, between the Boers and Irishmen) that even I who had seen could not excel. We had a picture of England cowering behind her fleet, weak, friendless, fallen, and in contrast with this a picture of Ireland "rising like an eagle to her dawn of freedom"; the one so vivid the other so stirring that I looked to see Christy blanching with envy. But Christy sat applauding generously (a hand thrust into his coat, the other rapping his stick upon the tiles); and turning Michael dashed upon the blackboard in flowing round-hand:

"To Hell with England."

And below, in mighty capitals:

"GOD SAVE IRELAND."

A roar of applause followed Michael as he stepped from the rostrum, giving place to Christy ; but I sat silent, thoughtful and frowning at the blackboard. I had an impulse to wipe out those mottoes and replace them with others less stirring in effect. They and the applause they evoked seemed somehow to uncover those smouldering fires ; brought to mind also the gasconade of John Hynes by his Protestant hearthstone. Could nothing teach these Irish, nothing kill in them their passion for whirling phrases, nothing stamp out their eternal animosities, nothing persuade them to abandon rhetoric for action, the lust of party for the virtue of country ? Were they all the same at bottom ? Was Michael only another John, John but a Protestant Christy, the Master himself just a superior John ; and what must happen when the viper of rebellion hissed loudly among them ? Could leaders restrain these men before me ? Could any mortal power inspire them with wisdom in the great day of deliverance ?

I looked from the blackboard, and there in the rostrum stood Christy, his hand across his Napoleonic breast. Well. Was not Christy Irish like myself ?

I had not need of proof that Christy was an orator. I remembered the scene by Moran's hearthstone ; and what he said in the rostrum was altogether in the manner, and a good deal in the form, of what he had said in the kitchen.

Indeed I have a notion that none of it was altogether new, for some among his audience yawned to his face and a few went asleep. However, I listened attentively ; and eagerly in a while, when, having disposed of England and her "rotten carcase of an

Empire," having glorified the Boers, magnified the Irish, declaimed on the possibilities of fifty thousand boys with rifles, he turned towards myself and, just as though I were the one man in the schoolroom, began expounding the nature of what he called the new strategy—the strategy, that is, which the Boer war called into existence, the strategy, let us say, of fifty thousand Hillsiders holding the hills with rifles against the panoplied array of England's mercenaries.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, said Christy, these mercenaries abroad in Armoy, with their "traps an' their contrivances, their popinjays of officers an' their scarecrows of generals in gold lace an' cocked hats; what, in that case, would be the duty of the Armoy commando an' such other commandoes as might be waitin' behind the ditches? 'Twould be this," said Christy pointing a finger at me. "'Twould be this," said he with much labour of hand-whacking. "'Twould be this," shouted he, and plain as a pikestaff told me to my face that I was not the only man in Armoy who knew the art of war. He knew, he Christy Muldoon; he the Napoleon of the new strategy.

"All the ould musty rules an' tactics are not worth that," cried Christy snapping his fingers. "Was De Wet college bred, I ask ye, with a cartload o' medals on his breast an' as many letters to his name as would write a proclamation? No, sir. Was it squintin' at books an' clinkin' their heels on parade that taught the Boers how to lick Buller at Colenso an' cut the Highlanders into ribbons at Magersfontein? No, sir. What did that handful o' ignorant Dutchmen know o' drills an' target practice an' the art o'

marchin' to their death in fours deep? No more than a heathen Kaffir. Who saved the Saxons from bein' rushed into the sea like a drove o' pigs? The yeomen farmers, sir, the lads from the Australian bush, an' the forests o' Canada; anyone who knew how to live behind a stone, an' shoot straight, an' ride a horse, anyone who had common sense below his thatch. There's for ye. There's the new art o' fightin'. There's the new strategy that the ignorant Dutch taught the world. Common sense—natural genius—straight guns—open eyes—plenty o' horses—there's the whole business in the crown o' your hat," cried Christy with wide-spread arms, his big face aglow with natural genius, his narrow eyes saying plainly, "Put that in your pipe, captain Shaw, an' smoke it."

Well, I put it in my pipe. I understood Christy. I respected his Napoleonic genius, bowed my head before the triumphant rush of his common sense. For all that, I sat smiling bravely, determined maybe that the leader of the Armoy commando should not be Field-Marshal Muldoon. My pipe is smoking, Christy my son, thought I; then blanched where I sat. For there was my Commando calling me to the empty rostrum.

Here was a predicament. What had I to say? How meet that crowd of eager faces? But, "Now, captain. . . . Yourself, captain. . . . We're waitin' for ye, captain," went the voices: so, quaking in my shoes, I crossed the tiles and amid a storm of cheers faced my Commando.

They were indulgent. It was a new thing I suppose for them to have sound of a halting tongue.

"Speak out, captain," they said. "Let it out, like a man." I thanked them for the honour they did me. "Arrah, not at all, captain," they answered. I hoped we might soon be, and might continue, good friends. "Sure we're that this minute, captain," was the response. I asked them to give me their consideration, their trust and loyalty. "It's yours, captain," came the word. For myself I was a stranger among them and as such had to prove my metal. "You're one of ourselves, captain," went a cheery voice. But they had all my sympathy, they would find me ready and true; all of me body and soul I vowed to them and the Cause there as I stood. With that the cheers shrilled up, and among the desks I saw the faces leap. Then something stirred in me. My brain warmed. Words swelled and flowed. Stretching out my arms towards that sea of leaping faces, tossing there within the ring of lamps, I cried to them.

"Lads, it's true, it's true. I do give myself to you body and soul. If blood must be shed then let mine be shed for you and Ireland. But, lads, listen to me. Let us be wise. Let us be humble. Victories are not gained by shouting, or by ridiculing the other side. Let us do and not talk. Let us have no word of bloodshed now, and let us pray God that none may come. We want victory. We shall have victory. Ay, but God willing, a bloodless victory. We want no man's life, no man's wealth. We have buried our animosities, trampled out the memory of our oppressions. We strike for freedom. . . . Ah, lads, let us be wise in the days that are coming, and let us do nothing that may sully our name as Irishmen. We shall be tempted much, we may have to endure much,

victory may come harder than we know : ay, but what a victory if it be stainless, if it be white as the driven snow. Irishmen, I ask you to be always Irishmen. Irishmen, I ask you to be true to our country. And now to your feet, lads, to your feet."

I leaped upon the rostrum stool. The meeting rose to me. Together we sang "God save Ireland"; then cheering and singing swarmed out into the starlight.

It was a fine bracing night ; and as Christy and I went through it, homeward across the fields asleep within their crowding hedges with a window shining lonely here and there, we talked of many things.

"Yon was a great speech, captain. Faith 'twas powerful now. Never did I see the boys so wild. They're at your feet, Shaw, from this hour."

"Yes. I suppose so. I've proved myself a true Irishman now, Christy. . . . No matter. Talk away."

"To be sure," said Christy ; and talked away. Now that I was one of themselves, sworn and pledged, nothing need be kept from me. Soon I would know all ; soon be at the heart of things. That meeting was only a general meeting ; at it, I may have noticed, nothing secret was talked. No use tempting Providence too much, said Christy ; no use telling the boys more than would keep them going. All the minor secrets were left to the district Council of picked men ; all the big secrets to the care of the district Committee—the six, including Moran and himself, I had met in Moran's kitchen. Now I was one of the Council, now the Committee was seven ;

now every night till the great night came I would be busy enough, drilling the boys, discussing plans, transacting business, and every day my hands would be full. Ah, there was a power to do—rifles to be examined, ammunition to be inspected, the Commando to be visited one by one at their houses and put through their facings. "There's cartridges in that field," said Christy pointing across a hedge. "There's stuff in boxes in the hill beyond. We'll drill this week in the flat over there."

"So you're not above drilling, Christy?" said I, my eyes on the Napoleon of the new tactics.

"Aw, divil a bit," came back. "Sure it keeps things goin'; an' what harm is there in bringin' the boys together a time or two? Look now, we've only to put a match to the whins on the mountain beyond, an' four commandoes are in their places inside an hour. D'ye see?"

"I do. And when will the whins be lighted in earnest, Christy?"

"Ah, that's a question, captain. There's maybe one man in Ireland could answer it this minute; it's meself can only advise ye to keep an eye on the next full moon."

"I see. And who's the man?"

"Who?" Christy turned on the road. "By the seven churches, captain, if I could answer that I could tell ye the day I'd die. He's *someone*. Maybe he knows himself. Ourselves just call him The Man Above."

"Above where?"

"Aw, somewhere. Maybe in Dublin, maybe in Belfast. God knows where."

"Ah. Then you don't know everything, Christy?"

"Is it me? Man, *everything* would bury me with the worry of it."

"But the others—the leaders—the organisers—the men in touch with The Man Above—you'd know them, Christy?"

"I might, captain; but I don't. They're just—just things you'd write on a slate. Figures. Number one here. Number two there. Number twenty-five in Fermanagh county."

I understood. It was an ancient Irish device; and I liked it little. Would the Leaders be Numbers in the days that were coming; days, let us imagine, of affliction? "But you're not a Number, Christy; nor I; nor the boys we know? We're only Leaguers. If we're wanted at any time for any purpose, we can easily be found?"

"Aw, easy as walkin'," answered Christy.

"Quite so." I walked silently for a while. "But yourself has put men behind some of the Numbers, I'm thinking, Christy?"

"Is it themselves? Ay. Aw, maybe. Sure I've guessed. I'd imagine some of them had seen New York, an' some of them could defend ye before a judge, an' I'm thinkin' more than one has caught the Speaker's eye, an' sure I've a notion that a few'd look well in long coats an' top hats."

"Oh. The Fathers themselves, Christy?"

"Ay. Aw, maybe. Sure I'm only guessin'. How could I tell? An' what matter, anyway? Sure it's ourselves will do the business. To be sure."

Yes; it was ourselves would do the business. I laughed up at the solemn stars. We walked silently, each pondering his own thoughts; in a while came

to Christy's gate. "Well, I suppose the Leaguers will do their duty, Christy," said I, "Numbers or no Numbers?"

"Ay. To be sure . . . I'm hardly followin' ye, Shaw."

"No? Well, no matter, my son. You'll follow me soon. Good-night. Sleep well." I walked a little way; turned and came back. "Another word, Christy. Let us be quite clear that no number, but just one man, is leader of the Armoy commando. Am I plain?"

"As broad day," answered Christy, his hand across his breast. "But I suppose the one man wouldn't be above takin' a word of advice?"

"At times, Christy."

"Then he's not above shakin' hands, captain," said he; and we shook hands.

Did I attempt fully to record my doings in the days and nights that followed I should weary you. One day was much like another, this night like the last, and all full. I worked hard. I left nothing undone. Before a week had gone I was at Christy's heart of things, everything discovered that might be discovered, the rest guessed at or left unguessed.

Of the League itself I need say little. Christy's account of it had been true enough. It was complete, simple in form, perfect in detail, scattered yet bounded, huge yet wieldy, national yet secret, its rule firm, its means adequate, its object plain; the work of a master mind. Whose that mind was I never knew; nor till long afterwards could I place real men behind the Numbers that served him. However, that is only a detail. Just now and here I am concerned only

with my own affairs, and the affairs of the Armoey commando.

As an organization it also was well enough, as a commando perhaps not so well. It was cohesive, had spirit and enthusiasm, was influenced by certain elementary principles of discipline, guided by a common motive towards a common national object. Each man knew his place and what was expected of him; had a good rifle and sufficient ammunition hidden in the thatch or buried in the fields, had a beast to ride, or promise of a beast, or hope of finding one somewhere when the whins were lighted; also, in case of emergency, had a reserve of flour and oatmeal under the bed. A cart would carry all our transport. Food and lodgings would come. Our plan of campaign was simplicity itself. We contemplated a quick and bloodless victory; were prepared for a victory not bloodless and not quick. Ireland would be ours in a night; of that we were certain; and after that—Well, time would tell.

Every day I went from house to house, inspecting, advising, observing; on my way taking note of the country's every detail. What I found pleased me well. The women were resigned, thought all was for the best and was in God's hands; and might God send it would all soon be over.

"You're not afraid, Bridget?" I would say.

"Aw, no. Sure what would I be afraid of. It's all in God's hands. Sure things may be better, an' they can't be worse."

"And what will you do when Pat's away?" I might ask.

"Aw, trust in God, an' wait for him to come back."

With the men it was much the same. They were ready ; they hoped for the best and left all to the good God in whom, through all happening, they trusted entirely.

"You think we'll win?" I would say.

"With God's help," came back, often and often.

"You'll like your freedom, Pat," I would say. "It will be great to be your own master in your own country?"

"Ah, it will now. Sure it'll be a change anyway. We can't be worse an' we may be better."

"You're sure to be better, Pat."

"Ay. Well, we're hopin' so."

"But you'll remember the order, Pat—no ravaging, no revenge, no blood?"

"It's in me prayers, captain."

"And you're ready if the word came to-night?"

"I'd drop the spade this minute, captain, an' follow ye."

Like that we talked together in those bright spring days. I like to recall that time and my wanderings through it from house to house in Armoy. It was pleasant service. I made great discoveries. I got to know the real Ireland, to understand its people and to love them. They were so patient, these simple folk, so resigned and trusting, so near to the great heart of things. Little pleased them. Their needs were small, their worldly hopes less ; but their gratitude for needs supplied and hopes deferred was great. I have sat many times by smoky hearthstones envying in my worldly heart the humble virtues—virtues which, I suppose, few Protestants ever discover—that flourished there ; have gone away wondering in myself

if it were wise to disturb their peace. But the Cause must march. The whins must blaze. I must see Leah again. And Jan Farmer and I had an account to settle.

The nights too were full. This night it was a meeting in the schoolroom, with orations by Christy and Moran and demonstrations on the blackboard by Michael Slane ; the next found me presiding in Christy's parlour, tea being cleared and the glasses filled, over the Council of picked men ; the next saw me discussing business transactions, to say nothing of poteen and a pack of cards, with the select Committee in Moran's smoky kitchen ; or a squad had to go through its facings in some dismal barn, or the Commando perform its evolutions on some lonely hillside.

Such happenings I have seen in those draughty barns, such spectacles on those wind-swept hills. Imagine twenty men crouching behind twenty ditches on one clay floor, and snapping twenty rifles at my glittering eye in a corner or at a guttering candle on the wall. Imagine three hundred troopers, of whom a hundred were mounted, tramping the hillside into mud, the horse riding down the foot, the foot running from the horse, every man in his wrong place, all excited, all bewildered ; myself raging tempestuous, Christy in pastoral regimentals aping Napoleon on a cart-horse, Moran in slouch hat and long frieze coat cutting capers on a rusty mule. I can laugh now at thought of the performance ; then I laughed seldom. However, drill mattered little. Our exponent of the new tactics scorned it. Our bloodless victory could be achieved without it. If fighting came, if the Pro-

testants resisted or England sent its mercenaries ; then would Irishmen do what the Boers had done. I gave Christy the local rank of Adjutant, made Moran Quartermaster, made Slane Intelligence Officer and honorary Paymaster of the Force, selected twenty men and appointed them Sergeants and Corporals of troops ; put a trustworthy man in charge of the ammunition cart ; taught the Commando to ride in order, to carry rifles, to obey certain signals and words of command, made plain the conditions of my leadership and the penalties of disobedience : and with this was content. Things might be better ; they could be worse. I had done what I could.

The night came nearer with the waxing of the new moon. We had word from The Man Above to prepare. I wrote to my relations, the few I had in the world, saying I had fresh adventures in sight ; bade my Lackan friends farewell, took train at Bunn town and, by way of Lismahee and Garvagh ferry, came back to Armoy and Christy's house. Already I had received from London my khaki uniform (including the slouched hat with its red badge that soon was to give a new name to my Leaguers), my revolver and ammunition, my cloak and belt. In my pouch was a store of English gold. In Christy's stable a horse stood waiting. I was ready. We were ready.

The night came near ; was fixed ; but only Christy and myself could name it. Twice in succession fires blazed on the mountain, merely to test the Commando and to delude the Protestants. To a man the Commando turned out on each occasion, ready and eager ; in Gorteen and Clackan, in Lackan and Emo, our fires only woke to new vigour the rolling of Orange drums.

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Let them roll. Red Shaw and his men were coming.

Then one day—the ninth of May it was—I rode through Armoy and whispered a word at each doorway. And at nine o'clock that night the whins blazed in earnest.

CHAPTER V

THE RISE OF THE MOON

"I T'S up," said Christy, turning from the doorway. "Well, it's business at last, captain." He shook his fist at Gorteen, where the drums were rolling. "Bang away," he shouted. "There'll soon be holes in ye. Come, captain."

I looked at the mountain and its line of signal fires, at the blaze on the Rock out beyond Drumhill and the glimmer that shone on the moat above Lismahee ; then buckled on my cloak and took my hat with its red badge from the table, bade the weeping Mrs Muldoon good-bye and went out to the yard.

There Quartermaster Moran sat in pastoral regimentals on his mule, Paymaster Slane was tightening the girths of his broken-kneed pony, Adjutant Muldoon in slouch hat and long frieze coat was mounting his cart-horse from a kitchen chair, and Mary the servant stood holding my black charger by the stable doorway.

"God bless you, Mary," said I springing into the saddle.

"Aw, God be with ye all," wailed Mary.

"Good-bye — good-bye — aw, good-bye, Christy," moaned Mrs Muldoon, her hands up and face streaming.

"Ready, boys?" said I. "Then forward in God's name."

And we rode for the meeting-place.

It was a dry night, chilly and dark, with stars shining and the moon not yet risen. Christy and I rode in front, the others straggling behind; and as we went Christy talked unceasingly, full of bravery and words as any schoolboy questing adventure in the night. I let him talk. My humour favoured silence.

In thought all Ireland was spread before me, roused and trampled from sea to sea. I saw it roused. I heard the trampling. So peaceful all seemed beneath the clouded sky with the stars shining through and the wind blowing soft; windows gleaming on the hillsides, fires dying on the hearths. There lay the fields asleep, there stood the silent hills. From sea to sea this Emerald isle was wrapped in the cloak of night, mists were creeping in the valleys and streams murmuring on lonely mountain sides; yes, and from sea to sea, from Malin head to Cork, from Achill to Dublin city, the mountains and hills were alight with signal fires, and down them and along the valleys and across the hills men were hurrying, man by man gathering in, silently, stealthily, to a thousand meeting-places. At that hour women were wailing and praying by thousands of hearthstones; at that hour sleep was descending on thousands of homes that to-morrow would be desolate. Hear the wailing and trampling; see the signal fires gathering the Leaguers in and in; see the lights go out one by one in Protestant homes. Upon what scenes would the moon soon look down? Over how changed an Ireland was the sun to rise in the coming day? When it looked across the

Emo hills what would it see in Gorteen and Clackan, in Lackan and Emo, in the woods of Curleck and the fields of Derryvad? Where should I be then?

Well might Christy chatter; well might I go silently!

Our meeting-place was in a rushy field that lay back from the road which runs through the heart of Armoy. We found the Commando gathering fast. Before the fires were low on the mountain half of it had come; the fires were not dead when every man was ready in his place. I ranged them in four lines and with my Staff inspected them; then had each man served with twenty rounds from the ammunition cart; then rode out in front and called them to attention. Like spectres they stood ranked in the darkness, silent before me.

"Lads," I said, "the hour has come. As Irishmen we have to do our duty, as Irishmen our duty will be done. You know what is before you. You know what I expect of you. Yow know the penalty that awaits the man who fails in duty or obedience. I shall have no violence, no ravaging. Our work is to gather in the men and arms and horses. With women and children, with goods and chattels, we have nothing to do. If there be resistance I shall act. If there be fighting I shall order it. Go quickly. Act promptly. Obey. Be brave. Be patient. Remember the word: *Erin go bragh*. Irishmen to your work, and God be with us."

I gave the word to form and march; then galloped to the roadside and stood back to see the Commando go past. It was ten o'clock. The drums were silent

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in Gorteen. The mountain was dark. Over Emo the moon was rising.

In order, two by two and troop by troop, the Commando came out upon the road, wheeled and went slowly past me. First came the mounted men, three hundred in all, the majority on horses, some on mules and jennets, a few on donkeys ; then the ammunition cart, then a cart laden with two days' rations, including beer in a cask and poteen in jars, then a tax cart driven by Dr Sheehan of Lack and filled with medical stores ; then eighty men for whom mounts had to be found ; then a score of transport carts and cars in charge of a sergeant whose duty would be to guard the prisoners. Each man was dressed in work-a-day clothes, tweeds, frieze, corduroys, hats, caps, heavy boots, some with leggings, some with straps below the knee or lengths of knotted rope ; each carried his rifle slung, a bandolier, and a bag of rations. It was a motley Commando ; but it would serve. It had cohesion, spirit, enthusiasm ; was loyal and not undisciplined. It meant business. Proud I watched it pass and saluted troop by troop ; then cantered to the front and led it on.

We were timed to begin work at eleven o'clock, the hour at which Gorteen always was asleep ; so there was no need for hurry. In Catholic Armoy we were quite safe, all the cottages by the way being alight only in our honour, women and children clustered in the doorways and occasionally an old man waving his staff ; and much of Armoy lay yet before us. Smoking and talking, therefore, we marched between the hedges and past the moonlit hills ; eager all and full of confidence. But sometimes as we went,

Adjutant Christy still chattering, Quartermaster Moran swearing at his mule, Paymaster Slane exchanging jests with the leading files, I had long spells of silence, and constantly I kept picturing what was happening under the moon in Ireland at that hour.

By this time all the commandoes had gathered and should be on the march. In most places they had only to assemble, seize a post-office, a police barracks, a railway station and a score of prisoners; and their work for the night was done. But elsewhere, round the military centres, round the cities and ports, in all the Protestant districts and in those only half Protestant, work would be harder and sterner. Even in the three Catholic provinces, the Ireland which lay south of a line drawn roughly between the Bays of Dundalk and Donegal, the commandoes had to do more than march if Dublin and Cork and Waterford and Galway, their garrisons and arsenals and shops, were to be ours before sunrise, if the Curragh was to be surprised and the garrison towns rushed, if the wires and cables were to be seized, and all the banks, the post-offices, the harbours, the barracks and depôts. Fortunately the garrisons were weak, the police few and lax, and there were traitors in all the gates; nevertheless the gates must fall. A false move, a reckless manœuvre, a stumble, a blunder, and there might be wild doings in the moonlight. Still, below the line was secure, was ours for a certainty whatever the doings; it was Ulster that stood in the way. Could we clear Ulster, cripple it before it had chance to strike? These Protestants were not all John Hyneses, their lairs not all so easily reached as Gorteen and Lackan and Emo. Could Belfast be overthrown by the

gathering commandoes without bloody strife in its stony streets? Would the commandoes be inside Londonderry before its gates were closed? Enniskillen and Omagh and Monaghan, Armagh and Coleraine, all the Orange towns and villages of Fermanagh and Tyrone, Down and Antrim, Monaghan and Armagh and Londonderry; these held men whose watchword always had been *No surrender*. Could we force surrender? The commandoes which stealthily at that hour were closing in, man by man creeping in the moonlight past hill and valley; could these swoop together upon the Protestant lairs scattered wide over seven counties without rousing the lions to battle? A reckless shot, a word of warning flashed in time, and a district would be ablaze, a county rallying to roll of drum, a town held by defiant citizens with a rifle behind every window; and then would be stern work for the Leaguers. Still our chances, even in the seven counties, were more than good. Many places were ours already, many must fall surely: the rest, did the worst happen, could be overwhelmed from below the line inside a week. We had but to follow our plan, to strike quick and sharp, and within a night Ireland was ours from shore to shore. Could we follow the plan? Could we strike quick and sharp? Was it sure that before sunrise all the Protestants around me, now sleeping peacefully there among the hills, would be gathered safely without strife or bloodshed into the camp at Bunn? What of Leah in the hours that were coming? What of Jan and the Master? What of myself and the Red Leaguers? As the Hillsiders do say—God knew.

Nearing Lackan bridge, across which ran the Bunn road and beyond which lay the Protestant districts, I halted the Commando and prepared it for action. Work was now in sight, the hour for work was near. I closed up the ranks, ordered pipes out and strict silence; spoke a few last words to the men as I rode along the line; then called out the officers and gave them final instructions. There was to be no straggling, no dallying. Files would march on the grass margins of the road and when advisable would take to the fields. Orders were to be few and sharp. Any Protestant met or discovered on the march was to be ambushed and seized. All prisoners were to be passed back at once to the guard, any resisting to be bound and gagged. Fifty foot under Sergeant O'Hea would patrol the road from the border of Gorteen to Leemore cross, would cut off fugitives, see that the women did not give the alarm and would keep in touch with the prisoners' guard. A hundred men in command of Adjutant Muldoon would take the road from Leemore cross to Garvagh ferry, clearing the country inwards to the hilltop as they went, would sweep back by the lough roads and join me with the main commando in Gorteen. Paymaster Slane would hold himself ready to clear Derryvad with a troop. Quartermaster Moran would act as my second in command. So far as was possible we should keep in touch, and any mishaps were to be reported to me. "Am I understood?" said I, at the end.

"Ye are, captain," came back, though Moran answered sullenly.

"Any questions?" asked I.

"Not a one, captain," answered Christy, his hand

already across his Napoleonic breast; but Moran looked up at me under the slouch of his hat. "I'd have one," said he. "How is it I'm not trusted with some kind of a command?"

"We can't all command, Quartermaster," said I. "But second, you know, sometimes comes to be first."

"I see. To be sure." Moran considered a moment; then glanced at me under his hat. "Then may I always be second, captain?" said he, and pulled viciously at his mule. "Gar up, ye divil," cried he, and kicked hard with his heels. The mule plunged; out went Moran upon the road; and I was glad. For the Quartermaster was not to my liking.

This over I looked at my watch. It was five minutes to eleven. The moon was high. Gorteen was asleep. "Fall in the officers," said I. "Men, remember the word—*Erin go bragh*. The Commando will march." I signalled to Christy. He twisted in his saddle, shouted, "Forward, me sons"; then, proud as any peacock, rode past at head of his hundred on his big cart-horse. "Good luck, captain," said he with a wave of the hand. "An' may glory wait us."

I had half a mind to flutter the peacock; but of what avail? Touching my hat, I prayed that in the coming hour my Napoleon might not fail me. Somehow—somehow——

It was too late. The section turned at Lackan bridge, and followed by the prisoners' guard and the patrol, went swinging towards Leemore. The moonlight flashed on the rifles, gleamed on bit and stirrup iron. Now and again a trooper turned and shook an arm above the hedgerow. At top of the slope Christy twisted round and waved his hat. The rumble of

wheels grew less and less ; presently died away and I knew that Christy was summoning Henry the Hump from his sleep. Then I raised a hand. "Now, lads," said I ; and two by two, with the road between, uphill we went straight for the heart of Gorteen.

The first house we came to stood on the hilltop, just beyond what was called the Chapel gate, and facing the road. Here lived a man named Mires with his wife and three children. The house was quite still, but at sound of us, and for all our carefulness, a dog in the yard behind began to bark. I halted the Com-mando, with Moran and ten men (one of whom carried a dark lantern) passed through the front gate up the little garden, and leaving the men crouched in shadow of the hedge, knocked hard on the door. No one answered. I knocked again. "May they all sleep as sound in Gorteen this night," whispered the Quarter-master. I nodded ; was just in the act of knocking once more when a window was raised in the gable-end and Mires put out his head.

"Who's there ?" asked he.

"Friends," answered I and stepped beneath the window.

"Who are ye ?"

"Friends," said I again.

"What d'ye want ?"

"Come and hear," said I ; "and be quick for business is pressing."

"Is that you, Shaw ? Who's that with ye ? In God's name, Shaw, what's wrong ?"

It was the strangest thing to stand bandying words in the moonlight with a man half frightened and half asleep, a man too whose body I wanted and whose

home I would search. I felt something at a disadvantage.

"Come, come, Mires," said I. "There's something to tell you ; but you must come to hear it."

"Is it now?"

"Yes, this present minute ; and quick, Mires, quick."

He looked at us a while ; then drew in his head and closed the window. "Look out for the gun, Shaw," whispered Moran. "Quiet," said I ; and with that slipped back to the doorstep. I heard the stair creak, and a door open, and feet padding in the hall ; then a bolt shot back, the door opened, and Mires in shirt and trousers, feet and head bare, a candle in this hand, a gun in that, stood before us.

At once I covered him with my revolver, stepped in and took the gun from him and handed it to Moran. "In Ireland's name," said I. "Mires, you're our prisoner. Dress yourself quick. Make no noise and you'll get no hurt. Quick, I say."

He backed away and stood against the wall looking at me across the candle. "In the name of God, Shaw," mumbled he, "what's this? Is it—is it a risin'?"

"Something like that," I answered ; "but you'll know all presently." I took the candle from him and caught him by an arm. "Come, dress yourself like a man and come quietly. You'll get no hurt if you do."

He stood gaping at me, his eyes like the eyes of a startled hare. "A Papish risin'," he mumbled ; "a Papish risin'."

Upstairs I heard feet thumping on the boards and a woman's voice calling, "James, James—what is it, James?"

"Quick," I ordered, raising my revolver. "Stop

that noise, I bid you; and be back here in five minutes."

He turned at that, went along the tiled hall and up the narrow staircase; myself and two men following close, Moran and his eight turning into the kitchen with the lantern. On the narrow landing stood Mrs Mires, half dressed and with a red and black shawl about her shoulders. "For heaven's sake, James," she cried, "what's this that has come upon us?"

"God knows, Mary," he answered. "I'm fearin' it's the Papishes come for me."

"What! The Papishes? Ah, my God!"

"Ay. It's strange," said Mires; then turned on the landing. "You'd be wantin' her and the children too?" he said, not without a touch of scorn.

"We want only yourself, James. Your wife and children will get no hurt."

"Well, thank God for small mercies," said Mires. "Come away, Mary."

But she fell to wailing and craving my mercy. James could not go. James must not go. Is it leave herself and the children all alone and he going out into the dark, maybe to be shot? Ah, no. Ah, no!

My brow was cold with sweat. "Go to your bed, Mrs Mires," I said, "and sleep well. You've only to keep quiet and James will come back to you. Quick, Mires."

The two went along the landing and into their bedroom and closed the door. A bitter sound of sobbing came to me, rising above the tramp of Moran and his men in the kitchen and the clatter of hooves in the yard.

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Three minutes I waited, then strode and rapped on the door. "Time's up," I called. "Come, Mires."

With that the sobbing grew to wailing, mingled with the cries of startled children; grew wild and piteous as Mires came out with his wife clinging to him. "They'll kill ye," she shrieked; "they'll kill ye. Never, never will I see ye again. Ah, James, James. Ah, my God! They'll kill ye—they'll kill ye!"

I had to end this. "They will kill him, Mrs Mires, and they'll take you and your children and they'll burn your house if you don't keep quiet. Go back to your bed, woman, and you and yours will get no hurt. You hear me." She shrank back from me into the room and closed the door; and I turning followed Mires and the guard down the stairs and out into the garden.

Moran was waiting by the gate.

"Any arms?" said I.

"Not a ramrod," answered Moran, "an' not what powder would shoot a duck."

"Is the horse gone back?"

"It's gone, captain, an' the saddle an' bridle with it."

"Then pass on the prisoner."

I mounted my charger, gave the word to advance; and we moved on between the hedges, a white face looking down upon us through the window below the thatch.

The moonlight lay broad upon the land, a great peace brooded on all the hills; yes, and behind Mary was weeping over her children and James was tramping between two troopers along the quiet road. How

many women were weeping in Ireland in that hour of her freedom, how many men going wild-eyed from scenes of bitter parting?

"She took it hard, captain," said Moran beside me. I nodded. "Ye were too easy with her, captain. Stiffen your back, man, or it'll be sunrise before we're out of Gorteen." Full of bitter thought I could only nod again. "What luck has Christy, I'm wonderin', over there," said Moran in a while.

Ah. I looked across the valley that lay between us and the Garvagh road, and with Moran wondered what Christy was doing over there. Was he also leaving white faces behind him, going through the moonlight with a sound of wailing in his ears? Suppose him in my place ten minutes ago; suppose—Tut. To glory with this snivelling. I stiffened my back, drove thought out, and rode on.

Only women and an old man lived in the next house, so we passed it by. Hillside, once the home of Martin Hynes the Squire, was now occupied by Catholics and needed no rousing of ours. Back from the road lay two houses among black poplar groves, but these could wait till Gorteen was cleared. Near the mouth of the pass that runs across Leemore bog was a cottage in which lived Red Bob and his wife; a couple that gave us small trouble, for Bob's wife was bedridden and Bob himself at sight of the Commando said, "Holy smoke, the Papishes are on us," and came out like a lamb.

It was good. Work was going well. At the Lough road I sent Slane with fifty men to clear Derryvad to the shore; then prepared for the conquest of Gorteen. It was now half-past eleven. The land



lay quiet. No light shone on the hillsides. By this Christy should be well on the way to Garvagh, marching parallel with myself; in an hour we should be together again, with Slane waiting for us at the cross, Gorteen and Derryvad all cleared, only Lackan and Clackan before us. "Forward, men," said I; then struck for the heart of Orange Gorteen.

Now Gorteen was the land of wisdom and its sons were stern watch-dogs of liberty. Within its borders lived no Catholic. Its houses stood thick among the orchards and fat pastures and many a roof sheltered two or three determined men, bold lads who had rifles in the corner and bayonets hanging on the wall, brave boys who would fight to the death if chance came and shoot a Papist at sight if fighting began. Here then was hard work to be done. We must go softly, subtly, like foxes in the night. So, ready and watchful, we stole through the moonlight, silent as ghosts along the grass by the hedges, over the border straight for the heart of Gorteen. You can see us go: two long snakes crawling behind the hedgerows fretting the edges of the moonlit road.

Just across the border, back a stone's throw from the highway, stood three houses in a cluster with only gardens and apple trees between, gravelled walks leading to the front doors, and lanes winding round the haggards to the yards. Here lived three families of Majors, father and two sons in the middle, married son on this side, son-in-law on that; five men who must come out together. We drew them well. Down the lanes went three squads creeping like cats. Down the gardens went three groups of ten stepping softly over the flower beds; Moran leading here, Sergeant

M'Aloon there, myself in the middle. The squads halted in the haggards, the groups scattered and crouched; then a knock on the door, a minute's waiting, a minute's parley between step and window; then a rush through the open door, a scuffle in the hall, a scramble on the stairs, a word and a threat to the startled women, and five prisoners marched down the gardens and back along the moonlit road. It was good. Another hour of such artful tactics and Gorteen would be gathered safe.

The next house was captured quick, and the next; but the next was Red Hugh Fallon's and there we had rousing work. Five minutes I stood parleying with Hugh as he leant across the white sill above me, his face grim and hard as the gargoyle on a spout; and for five minutes Hugh withstood my blandishments. "I'll hear your business now," said Hugh, "if it's so mighty pressin' . . . I'm at home in the mornin', then, an' your word can wait. . . . Good-night to ye, Shaw, an' safe home," said Hugh at last; and the window banged down.

This was bad; but bad must be made good. I stepped along the white-washed wall, past the parlour window with its green flower boxes, and whispered a word to Sergeant M'Aloon in the lane; then came back to the step and signalled Moran to my side. Softly he crept over the flower beds, his men slinking behind. A minute went; then with a crash the back door went in before willing shoulders, feet trampled in the hall, the door swung back and Red Hugh was trapped in his lair. Ay; but not taken.

He met us on the landing, clad in his flannel shirt and woollen night-cap; snorted and charged me with

a rusty bayonet fixed on a spade shaft. Just in time I jumped aside; the bayonet went dirl against the wall; before he could recover himself we were on him like flies round a bull, the lantern giving us light and the moonshine streaming through the door where Maria his wife stood whimpering. He said no word, but the sound of his rage was terrible and he fought like a madman. Twice he flung us off; once he caught me by the throat and tossed me against the wall, once took M'Aloon, the militia man, across the face with his arm and sent him crashing through the balusters down the stairs. But his raging was short. Our blood was up. Like wolves we leapt and crashed him down on the landing; then turned him over, bound his wrists together and stood him against the wall. Yet even now he stood unconquered, leaping, snorting like a lassoed bull. He spat at me when I spoke, defied me, cursed me for a Papist hound. I ordered him to dress; he spat again. I made Maria bring his clothes; he kicked them from him. Jane his daughter tried to calm him and was spurned like a dog; so at last we flung an overcoat over him, tied a handkerchief round his mouth, gathered his clothes into a bundle and carried him out, "You'll put on your pumps fast enough, me hero," said Moran the fox going down the stairs, "when the stones cool your toes."

"Have no fear, ma'am," said I; "we'll care him well and send him safe back to you."

"Ah, God have mercy upon us all," wailed Maria upon the landing; and, "God forgive ye," said Jane, standing calm before me in shawl and petticoat with the candle-light dim on her haggard face. I could only raise my hat and turn away.

The next houses lay back among the hills with only cart tracks leading to them; so leaving Moran and two troops in charge of the horses, I led the rest of my men on foot and in open order across the fields. We had nearly surrounded the houses, M'Aloon and myself stealing in towards the doors, when of a sudden a shot rang out from the direction of the Garvagh road, straight before us across the hills. The belch of it echoed wide and seemed to fill the world. Close after it came the sound of a skirl, then a mutter of voices and a woman's shriek; then dead silence once more. M'Aloon and I had crouched. We looked at each other.

"Christy?" whispered he, his voice tense as a fiddle string.

I dared not answer, for my heart was jumping and in imagination I saw all Gorteen springing to life at sound of that shot. But silence held everywhere, except back at the road where Moran was giving an order and among the hedges where the circle kept narrowing in. "Perhaps it's nothing," whispered I. "'Twas no rifle shot. Would it be a poacher after a duck?"

"Maybe," answered M'Aloon. "But it's over-late I misdoubt for ducks to be flyin'. Yon was an ould blunderbuss. . . . Whisht."

Again came a jabber of voices across the hills, a shout, a cheer; then—one-two-three—a crackle of shots in quick succession.

"My God," said M'Aloon crouching beside me, "what's happenin'? Them's rifles sure as death."

It was true. Christy had blundered. Gorteen must spring. Blood must flow. I hunkered in the

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ditch—seeing—seeing—seeing. From the road came a rising murmur of excitement followed by Moran's angry bark ; among the hedges the men were calling softly each to each. It was time to act. I rose, cool and ready. "Come, M'Aloon. Let us get this business done anyhow," said I ; and we took the houses in a rush.

That over I sent the men and prisoners back to the road, sent orders to Moran to take command for a while ; then with M'Aloon the militia man set off across the hills towards the Garvagh road. And as we went I saw Christy cowering before me like the traitor he was. "The new tactics—the new tactics—the Napoleon of the new tactics," whispered I to myself. "Oh, by God, I'll—I'll——" Why had I sent him ? What devil had tempted me to let him go ?

It was not far to the Garvagh road, and we had reached the top of the hill above it when of a sudden M'Aloon caught me by an arm and pointed to the figure of a man running down the Gorteen slope, crouching with a gun in his hand.

"It's a messenger for me," said I. "Quick, James——"

"It's no messenger—it's someone escaped from Christy an' off to spread the word. Look at them," cried M'Aloon and marked three men tracking in the fugitive's steps. "They're after him—Whisht."

We saw the man stop ; heard him shout, "The Papists are out—the Papists are out" ; saw him turn, drop on a knee and fire at his pursuers, then fling down his gun and speed on. And with that three rifles flashed on the hillside and three reports went echoing across Gorteen. But the man ran on, shouting as

he went, "The Papists are out—the Papists are out."

Here was a ghastly business. I could have wept with vexation on the hillside. The tragedy it was, the ghastly tragedy. Then I braced myself. "James," said I, "we're in for it now. In ten minutes the hive will be buzzing. But do your best, my son. Stop those fools. Stop *him* if you can. Then get back to Moran and tell him to sweep on like blazes—quick—quick before the hive swarms. Tell him to keep the men steady. Say I hold him responsible. Say I'll join him soon. Run, James, run."

Without a word James saluted me and went; and I hurried across the hilltop and down to find Christy.

He was easily found. On the wayside was a white house and about it, excited, angry, rebellious, his men were swarming, with Christy shouting among them like a drunken militia man. His hat was off, his arm beat the air. On the road lay a trooper, his shoulder shattered with slugs. By him stood a Protestant, bound as for execution. Near the house a woman was on her knees, wailing and praying with her children about her. At sight of me the men fell quiet and Christy came dashing at me on his big cart-horse, spluttering and gabbling.

"My God, Shaw," cried he, "my God above! I did me best, man; I did me best. It's not our fault. There were two in the house, an' we captured one, an' the other shot one of us an' made for the hill. I sent three boys after him, an' they fired without orders; an' now they want to shoot the prisoner because he fired at us, an' they won't hear me, an' . . . God knows, Shaw, it's truth," wailed Christy and wiped the sweat

from his face. "I did me best, man; I did me best."

Here was an ado; here a pretty leader; still, why chatter? The milk was spilt. I must act, not talk. I passed Christy by; examined the wounded man and gave directions for his care; sent back the prisoner, had the women and children taken into the house, then mounted a horse and ordered the men to fall in. Sullenly they obeyed. I rode to their head, wheeled and faced them. "Lads," said I, "remember your oath and remember your promises. God knows what is before us now, but let us face it like men. Steady, lads, and trust to me."

They heard me in silence, save for a muttered word here and there in the ranks; so, leaving twenty men and a sergeant to watch the road from Garvagh cross to Leemore, I called the advance and led the way uphill through the fields back towards the Gorteen road. For now that the hive was awake (as I made sure it was) my aim was to isolate it, to keep it from swarming into Lackan and Clackan and Emo, to drive it back towards the Garvagh road and the wilds of Drumhill, and to gather it quick with my whole strength, under my own eyes, whilst yet the bees were buzzing. I must rush, strike quick, trample hard; sweep Gorteen in as with a flood. So up we went through the moonlit fields.

Christy rode beside me, silent now and crestfallen. Once he broke into babblement, beginning again his "Lord, Lord," and his "God knows, Shaw, it's truth"; but I silenced him soon. At top of the hill we met the three returning with the fugitive, he marching between them held and bound. His face was bleeding,

his clothes torn to shreds, there was a bullet in his shoulder ; but he stood bold before me, hatred in his sullen eyes.

"Who caught him ?" I asked of the three.

"Ourselves an' M'Aloon," came back. "He fought us like a divil, but we held him tight."

"Had he gone far ?"

"As far as M'Aloon, captain ; but ourselves were on his heels."

"Has he spread the alarm ?"

"Naw, we'd be thinkin' not ;" and with that the Protestant spoke. "Haven't I, be damn ! Go on an' see. Ah, you'll catch it down there, me Papish scuts." He turned and shouted, "The Papists are out—the Papists are out." In a moment he was down and gagged. And we rode on.

Once across the hill it was easy to see that the alarm was spread. Lights twinkled in the houses, flitted among the orchards, and up to us came a sound of voices, a vague stir of excitement and commotion. Once a drum rolled a single note ; again a horn blew hoarsely ; once more we heard a door crash in, followed quick by a shout, a shot, and a hubbub of angry voices. And clear above all we heard the thud of hooves as Moran and his men swept in.

I lost no time. Extending Christy's men, a troop in this field, a troop in that, from the hill right down to the Gorteen road, I led them at the gallop straight upon the clustered orchards and crowding white houses of Gorteen. Already Christy himself, bent low in the saddle with coat tails flying, was tearing along the road with word for Moran and M'Aloon to sweep up towards Garvagh and Drumhill, in and in. Thus on

all sides would Gorteen be beset ; over there the lake, across there the wilds of Drumhill, on this side and that the Red Leaguers thundering in like a flood. Fast, lads, fast. On, boys, on. Give them no time. Strike quick and hard. One long mad burst and Gorteen was gathered before the guns were snatched from the walls. We saw the lights flickering and flitting, near and nearer ; heard nothing now but the thunder of hooves ; on, on ; then, flushed and reckless, crashed in among the orchards and the crowding white houses.

Now was no parleying between step and window ; no silent creeping in the shadows, but brutal rushing in the moonlight ; in with the door and out with the prisoner. No pity now for woman or child, though for either we had no more than a threat ; and the man unready went back as he was, no coat on his back, no shoes on his feet. Old and young we gathered them all ; pulled this man from his bed, caught that man in the yard and that slinking through the orchard, beat this down before he could shoot and that as he faced us in kitchen or hall. We seemed resistless. Half an hour of such work and Gorteen would be swept. . . .

Ay ; but listen to that drum beating in there, that horn blowing its alarm, that voice crying, " The Papists are up—the Papists are up," that shot from door or window, that volley as one of Moran's men falls dead and his comrades riddle a Protestant on his own doorstep. Hear the women screaming as they cowered, the men shouting as they ran, the Leaguers skirling as they rushed ; hear the Orange drum beating in there among the orchards—beating—beating the

alarm. The Papists were up ; ay, and the Protestants were rousing. Already blood was flowing. Those baleful fires were bursting into flame. Soon there would be wild work in Gorteen ; soon Clackan would be up and Lackan and Emo, and the wolves would be at each other's throats, and there would be butchery under the moon.

Was this our silent conquest ? This our bloodless victory ? Were these the men, these skirling savages, who had vowed me loyal service ? Was I the leader—I, Shaw of the Reds—who had trusted in their vows ? Half an hour ? Half an hour of what ? And after that—after that !

Well, thank God, I could still do something, and thank God not we had called the dance.

I did my best in that mad half hour, my little pitiful best. Impossible now to stamp out those fires, but all I could I strove to keep them down. From troop to troop I rushed, pleading, directing, threatening, trampling ; but I could not be everywhere, so ruthless things happened, ay, under my very eyes.

In his kitchen Thomas Hicks shot a man through the window and another in the shattered doorway ; cried, "To hell with the Pope," and died by Moran's hand on his hearthstone.

M'Aloon and his men rushed the house of Daniel Beere and found it empty ; but out in the yard a bullet from the byre broke M'Aloon's arm, and shouting defiance Beere was clubbed where he stood.

Going down a lane three men fired on us from the hedge ; and within a minute one was shot, the other wounded, the third sent back with a broken crown.

Round the house of David Graves (he who had

drummed the alarm so boldly) was a bloody contest. In the barn lay two men, in the house were three, behind the orchard wall were a couple more, all armed and defiant. Moran the fox tried to take them. "Come on, ye Papish whelps," shouted the seven and drove Moran's men back with a belch of slugs. Then came Christy, big with the lust of battle, brave and eager as a hungry mouse. "Come on, ye Papish dogs," cried Graves, and the slugs whistled death round Christy's ears and three of his men fell writhing. It was bitter work; but it had to be ended. So I came myself and ended it; fainted in front and drew the Protestant's fire, then before they could reload, rushed them right and left and captured them without losing a man. That satisfied me; but the Commando had the blood-thirst, and would have butchered the seven like sheep. "Give them to us," came the shouts. "Let us at them. To hell with the Orange dogs." I stood firm, my revolver raised, the seven clustered behind me. "This is no slaughter yard," said I. "The men are prisoners. Lads, would you disgrace your name? Back there," I shouted and led the Protestants safely through the snarling crowd. But when I had gone Moran the fox drove Graves' wife and children from the house, piled straw in the kitchen and fired it.

Need I say more of what happened that night in Gorteen? As we began so we continued; and enough is told to enable you to picture the end. We found Gorteen a garden, we left it a trampled wilderness, blood-stained, ravaged, dead men lying before the clustered houses and wounded in the orchard lanes, women crying to the God who had

forsaken them and children wailing at their mothers' skirts. A few houses were burnt. We took away all the horses and all the arms we could find ; took every man not dead or wounded, excepting only a handful that escaped in cots and hid in the islands or took refuge, with the few who escaped from Derryvad and Clackan, in the White House and Louth Castle. The prisoners numbered fifty-nine excluding those taken outside Gorteen ; of dead and wounded the Protestants had fifteen, ourselves thirteen in all.

It was a tragic reckoning. I make no attempt to assign the blame, to excuse ourselves or condemn the Protestants. Perhaps had Christy not blundered our victory had been bloodless ; but it may be that, in any case, somewhere in Gorteen blood was sure to flow. Its men were all armed, were born fighters and herded close ; it needed but a drum tap, a shout or a shot, to rouse them quick. And he who thinks that your Ulster Protestant will surrender at demand to a Catholic, if chance of a struggle there be, knows little of Ireland and less of its tragic history. For not in Catholic breasts alone are hidden those smouldering fires of passionate hate. Always it has been so ; and for this England must be judged responsible.

We sent word to the patrols to work round to Lackan bridge, took up our wounded and dead and marched out of Gorteen, by way of the main road, back towards Armoy. At Derryvad cross Slane was waiting for us with his prisoners, he also carrying dead and wounded. Slowly we went, Muldoon and Moran, Slane and myself in front, the Commando straggling behind. No need now for secrecy or creeping along the roadsides, none for silence in the broken ranks.

Christy might chatter his fill, Moran bark like a fox in the moonlight. Behind Gorteen was blazing its alarms. In front Lackan and Clackan and Emo were drumming and blowing, fires on the hills, commotion in the houses. Sound of the bell in Derryvad church came to us and of the bell in Louth farmyard. *Rub-a-dub* went the drums, *ding-dong* came the bells; all telling what was being prepared for us beyond Hill-side. Let them prepare. I had done my best. Their blood be on their heads.

As we rode I thought of Leah Hynes, of Jan Farmer my enemy, and of the Master, wondering when I should see them and how. Would Leah be in the house when we came to it; what would she do and say if we chanced to meet? I saw her face before me, heard her voice through the clatter of hooves. *The same God never made you and Jan Farmer.* Oh, I remembered the words. Wait, wait. I should see her Jan.

Rub-a-dub, went the drums; *ding-dong*, came the bells.

"Bang away," shouted Moran the fox, "we're comin' to burst ye."

Hear the Red Leaguers skirling; hear Christy the knowing at my elbow expounding our plan of campaign. "Now here's what we must do, Shaw. . . . Now here's the way to catch them."

See Gorteen blazing behind. Hear the drums beating in front. *Rub-a-dub. Rub-a-dub.*

As I rode I saw Ireland spread before me and wondered what was happening upon it—here, and here, and here. Had Dublin fallen? Was the Curragh ours? What was doing in Belfast, in

Londonderry, in all those districts of Ulster where Protestants held the hills? Were there dead, and wailing women, elsewhere in Ireland than in ravaged Gorteen? Had we only blundered of all those gathered commandoes? Was I, Red Shaw, the only leader who rode under the moon, sad and sick at heart? Hear the drums and the bells, hear the commotion that ran upon the hills. Hear Moran raving and the Red Leaguers skirling, hear the horses clattering on—To what? What lay before us? What new horrors had yet to be endured?

Enough. I had done my best. Let them prepare. Better honest fighting than furtive ravaging. On, my lads. Another hour and all would be done. Ireland for ever. Down with the Orange dogs.

Rub-a-dub, went the drums. *Ding-dong*, went the bells. *Clitter-clatter*, went we along the moonlit road.

The moon was high, the sky calm and clear, the time an hour past midnight.

CHAPTER VI

FROM MIDNIGHT TO DAWN

ON top of the hill which overlooks Armoy and commands Clackan, I led the Commando into the old chapel yard and there gave the men half an hour in which to bait horses, snatch a mouthful of food and smoke a pipe. In groups they sat upon the grass, scattered among the munching horses, with one now and then raising voice in a stave of some party song, and another stretching out for ten minutes' sleep, and another skirling high at sound of the Orange drums beating wild alarm. They were excited, lusty for ravage as hungry wolves. "Wait, by God," one shouted, jumping up and shaking his fist at Lackan and Clackan, "we'll burst your drum heads, me shavers, before sunrise." "Ay, by God, will we," snarled Moran the fox, his yellow teeth bared. "Wait, wait." "An' what might your plans be now, Shaw, me hero?" asked Christy, he sprawling on the grass before me, suave and fluent as new milk. "Now if my advice is worth anything to ye . . ."

It was worth nothing. Christy was a burst bladder. I wondered at the man's insolence, marvelled that he could lie there in my sight daring to say a word. No black sheep was he, but a wolf splattered red. 'Twas he had trampled Gorteen, he had set the drums beating,

and his feet were soaked in blood. Another would have seen the dead stark in the lanes, heard the women wailing by the hearthstones ; would be lying now crushed and stricken. And there he sprawled, fat, sleek, bleating like any lamb, daring to look me in the eyes and offer me advice. I could have spurned him with my boot. Beside him Moran sat a hero, for Moran was honest in his bark. But Christy was hollow as a drum.

From the corner where I sat upon a ditch, listening, watching, pondering, I could see the fires ablaze beneath the stars, could hear the bells and the drums, and the stir that ran among the hedges out towards Thrasna river. All the country was now awake. On the mountain were fires, and in Armoy, and upon wild Drumhill ; and out beyond the lake, in the direction of Lismahee, a glow upon the sky told me that not only in Gorteen had work been done. Yes, the country was awake. The Protestants were up and preparing for us. Fighting, good fighting if I knew anything, was before us. Beyond there John Hynes and his kind were gathering together with musket and bayonet ; over there the Master and Jan were making ready for Red Shaw.

Let them make ready. Who cared ? If they wanted fighting they would have it. Red Shaw's back was straight. Jumping to my feet I shouted, "Now, my lads" ; then swung into the saddle and prepared them for the end.

My dispositions were these. Our dead and wounded I sent back into Armoy. Our prisoners, now huddled in M'Avey's yard by Lackan bridge, most of them bound, many of them gagged, I put in charge of

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Christy the wolf, instructing him to hold them safe, and all others that might come, till further word of mine. To Slane, the schoolmaster, whose good work in Derryvad I commended, I gave a hundred and fifty men bidding him work slowly along the Bunn road up to Stonegate, holding the road and clearing the outskirts of Lackan as he went. From the patrol guard I called up Sergeant O'Hea, bade him take his fifty men and strike along the Clackan road from Lackan bridge. He would clear swiftly, make for junction of the road with the track that ran out past Hillside, and there at Lunny's house join myself and the hundred picked men who would be waiting to sweep Clackan northwards to the woods of Curleck, and southwards, beyond Clackan lough, back through Emo to Stonegate on the Bunn road. In this way we should take the Protestants on all sides, and up and down, and should drive them together; so would it befall that I myself should clear Clackan where lived my Leah Hynes, and Emo where I hoped to find my Jan; so in one great swoop had I planned it to end our work in Rhamus just above the slope that falls towards Thrasna river.

"Am I understood?" said I to Slane and Moran and Muldoon and O'Hea. "Have you any questions?"

"Naw," said Christy; "except it'd be to ask why I'm cashiered in a kind o' way? What is it I've been doin'?"

"Look back," said I, pointing towards Gorteen.

"But—but—man, Shaw, 'twasn't my fault. Lord above, I did my best."

"You can do it still, Muldoon, and I advise you to do it. Is that all?" And I looked at Moran.

He sat crouched on his mule looking steadily at me below his hat brim. "Ah, never heed me, captain," he answered. "Sure I can sit here watchin' the sport. Who am I, captain dear? Who am I?"

"You'll ride with me, Moran; and you'll keep civil, if you please. You understand me?"

"I'm tryin', captain. Well, I'll ride with a good man, an' divil cares anyway so long as I get me toe through one o' them cursed drums. Wait, wait," he muttered turning away. "Be the Lord, wait." I could answer nothing. Moran was an animal of a tangled pedigree.

I had ammunition served out; then, having inspected the men who had found their horses, I rode in front of the Commando and said, "Lads, they want fighting. Let us give them fighting." And such a cheer answered me as drowned even the drums on the Clackan hills.

I gave Slane and his men good time to reach Lackan bridge, waited till O'Hea had started up along the Clackan road; then led my hundred picked men down past Myres' house (was that a pale face still looking upon us from the narrow window?) and out past Hillside towards the long back of Clackan. Beside me rode Moran, hunched and sullen upon his mule, teeth bared, face grim with black hatred. "Wait, wait," he kept muttering at sound of the throbbing drums; "be the Lord, wait." Behind me the Leaguers swung on, singing and jeering, drunken with lust of battle. Talk of smouldering fires, of vows and promises, of bloodless victories. I was leader now of ravening wolves.

The few houses that lay among the poplars in the

hollow beyond Hillside, we found empty of everything alive except cats and dogs ; but in the barns and sheds we found women and children cowering behind straw and sacks of corn. Where were the men ? we asked. No one knew. Were they out on the hills ? we questioned. Ah, how could anyone tell. "Answer, ye divils," shouted Moran, threatening with voice and rifle ; and the divils answered that John and James and David were out with the guns, but where only God knew. "Then we'll know soon," said Moran the fox. "Wouldn't it help us to see them, Shaw, if we put a coal in the thatch now ?" "It might spoil the moonlight," answered I. "Get back to your beds, women ; no one will hurt you." And we rode on, scattered wide across the fields, with eyes keen on every hedgerow.

Halfway towards Lunny's house and the junction of Hillside track with the Clackan road, firing began in the hollow beyond Lackan bridge, scattered shots at first, then a volley, then odd crackling bursts among the hedges. Distinctly we could see the driving flashes, clearly could hear the sound of cheering and of rushing hooves on road and field. "They're at it, be the Lord," barked Moran beside me. "Listen. Listen. Man, if I was only there." The firing continued, the cheering grew wilder. Hurrying on we reached the road and saw a trooper dashing up towards us. "You're wanted, captain," he panted. "Slane's sent for ye. They're across the road, an' in the ditches, an' we can't get past, an' there's holy murder."

"Are there many ?" said I.

"Hundreds, captain ; thousands, captain. The

road's alive with them. They've got carts across it—an' they're in the ditches—an' it's holy murder, captain."

"Where's the place?" said I.

"Yonder. T'other side o' the bridge. Just by Hoey's house. Look. There where ye see the firin'."

I saw and understood. Slane was blundering now. Well, no matter. If all Lackan was gathered there beyond the bridge so much the better. I pointed across the fields. "O'Hea and his men should be there," said I to the trooper. "Go and fetch them." I turned to Moran. "You see the place?" said I.

"Clear as daylight," answered the fox.

"Well, take the men across the hill there. Go fast but keep at back of the hill till you're well past Hoey's house; then dismount, leave the horses with a guard, drop down to the road behind the Protestants and creep in upon them. I'll be waiting for you. At the signal rush. At the word fire. You understand?"

"The best, captain; the best. Be the King, it's great. Come, me sons," said Moran, and led his hundred across the fields and out upon the hill that shadows Bunn road. But I went down at a canter, O'Hea and his fifty with me, into the valley, and came soon to Lackan bridge.

There I found all confusion and panic. Christy was blaring in M'Avey's yard, cursing the prisoners, bullying the guard; and him I silenced quick. Men were running back from the barricade, fear-stricken, broken; and them I rallied behind O'Hea and his fifty. Dead and wounded were coming in, torn and slashed with slug and bullet. Up the road near

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Hoey's house, Slane was storming the barricade, rushing and firing blindly, striving madly, men skirling, horses plunging, whilst from ditch and barricade the muskets spoke to the sound of Protestant defiance. "Come on, ye Papish dogs," went the shouts. And Slane led on his dogs. And the dogs were slaughtered. And all was chaos.

I stopped the slaughter quick. Dashing up I called off Slane and his men, leaving the Protestants riotous with victory. The drums thundered behind the barricade and the fifes shrieked out with *Kick the Pope*. From the ditches the Protestants came forth and danced in the moonlight, reviling us as they danced. "To hell with the Papish crows," they shouted. "Down with the croppies. Come on, ye dogs, come on till we send ye to blazes. Away, black Shaw," roared one from the top of the barricade, a big man, Ned Noble by name, with a voice like a bull's; "away you an' your pack o' curs. Black Shaw. Black Shaw. To hell wi' the Pope, an' hurroo for King——"

Ned stopped just there. For taking Slane's rifle I gave him three answers, one at his feet, one at his stomach, the last at his head (for moonlight deceives the eye): and he toppled back among the drums.

That sobered the Protestants something and sent them hurrying to shelter. But the drumming continued behind the barricade and presently they began firing upon us. I let them fire. At eight hundred yards their smooth bores were as effective as pop-guns, and it suited my plans to have them waste ammunition on the troop or two that kept manœuvring up and

down across Lackan bridge ; preparing it might seem for another attack in front. But the real preparing was elsewhere. Already Moran and his men were in the ditches behind the barricade, O'Hea and his fifty were creeping along the hill on its right, Slane and fifty more were closing in on its left, and on the hilltop lay I waiting for the right moment to give the signal. It came soon ; then three times I whistled shrill, and at that the men on Lackan bridge dashed towards the barricade, the muskets rang out, and with a yell Moran and Slane and O'Hea rushed in upon the Protestants. They went down like rushes before a scythe. A few tried to escape and fell upon the fields ; a few fought desperately and died upon the road ; the rest threw up their hands and went back to Christy.

It was good. Part of Clackan and most of Lackan was now cleared effectively. We left the dead in a row upon the wayside, where the women might find them, sent the wounded to Dr Sheehan, and in triumph marched back to M'Avey's yard, the Commando cheering me like madmen. "Good boy, captain," went the voices. "Bully for you, me boy. Hurroo for Red Shaw." And this man wrung my hand, and that smote me on the back.

I felt proud enough, pleased with myself, pleased with the men, and never a qualm of regret. For this was honest fighting. The Protestants had dared us and had been beaten. The end now was sure. Another hour and Clackan would be swept to Curleck woods and we should be marching on Emo.

Ay. But where was Leah Hynes, and how would the Master and Jan receive us ? I looked back

towards Emo and saw a blaze on the hillside beyond Lackan lough. "What's that, Slane?" said I.

"By the Lord, it's—it's a Catholic house. They're workin', Shaw. Here's somethin' we didn't bargain for. Man, we ought to have been quicker." He stopped and caught me by the arm, his ugly face cocked sideways, his brow wrinkled. "Listen," he said. From the direction of Curleck, somewhere near the little colony of Catholics which lay on the northern border of Clackan, came a sound of firing. "They're at their divilments there too," said Slane. "By God, they'll massacre them. Quick with ye, captain."

I got into the saddle and called Moran and O'Hea to gather their men. "Bang them, Slane," shouted I. "And bang where they don't expect you. Come, my lads." And we made for Clackan.

In open order we went, extended from Clackan road on the left to Clackan lough on the right, and gradually closing in upon the narrow hog's back along which the road runs like a backbone down into Curleck; and at first we marched unopposed. Most of the houses were empty, the women and children hiding in shed or barn, the men gone to M'Avey's yard, or maybe waiting for the women on the roadside by Hoey's house, or else harrying the Catholics down by Curleck woods. We could hear them at their devilments down there, could see the cottages blazing; always could hear the drums beating defiance, and the bells tolling the alarm over by Louth Castle and from the steeple of Derryvad church. *Boom-boom-boom* went the drums, *dong-dong* went the bells out beyond the burning cottages; and seeing and hearing we rode on, drunken with desire of vengeance. Hardly could

I keep the men in check, save the houses from burning and the women and children from slaughter; hardly could keep Moran the fox from running amuck through Clackan with the wolves at his heels.

"Let us out, Shaw," pleaded the fox, "let us out." But I would not—not till I had found Leah. "Time enough, Moran," said I. "We'll be there before long." "Ah, long," moaned the fox, his face devilish with black passion. "It'll be years—it'll be years!"

Not all the houses in Clackan, however, were empty; not all the men gone away. William Johnston we found at home, a man of sixty with a bald crown and grizzled whiskers, seated in his kitchen with his family around him and he comforting them with a chapter from Isaiah. We dealt softly with Johnston. John Nixon also we found at home, with barred doors and windows, a carbine waiting for us behind a window, and a rusty bayonet when the door crashed in. We gave Nixon short shrift and left his house blazing on the hillside. Samuel Noble's was empty, but as we stepped into the yard a bullet from the barn-loft wounded a trooper; and in a twinkling Samuel Noble toppled into the yard like a sack of corn. Charles Grieg, who was ploughman at Louth, we pulled from beneath the bed in which lay his wife and two children; Daniel Grove and his care we took from their hiding-place in the attic; Henry Short (nicknamed Long Short) was concealed in a haystack and might have escaped had not his dog betrayed him; Thomas Willis, like another in Gorteen, fired once from his hearthstone and fell riddled like a sieve. Also, just in sight of Leah's house, we came upon

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two carts set across the road, a man in each and two more lying behind the wheels. They gave us a volley, but two only awaited our rush; the others flung away their guns and went headlong through the fields down towards the lake. Some of the Leaguers dealt with the two who stayed, some gave chase to the two who ran or tried to stop them with a bullet. They reached the shore, jumped into a cot, and one at the oars, the other at the paddle, tried to make the Emo side. Like madmen they strove, crouching and swaying, the cot leaping on amid a hail of bullets. Presently he at the paddle toppled over and lay with his head across the gunwale, an arm dragging in the water; and a minute after he at the oars fell back off the thwart with his feet in the air. Poor lads—poor lads! Often now I see them in my sleep, drifting silently through the moonlight.

There was a light in John Hoey's. Leaving Moran in command, with orders to wait for me, I went alone down the lane past the orchard and haggard and came to the green door with its brass knocker and sandstone step. I could smell the wall-flowers in the window-boxes and the whitethorn in the garden hedge. Everything was very peaceful in that sheltered spot, the poplars and apple trees hiding it away from all the horror of the night. Nothing stirred about the house; yet my ears were filled with the clamour of the hills, the noise of bells and drums and rifles, of the Leaguers snarling on the road and the Protestants harrying near Curleck, and hating myself for a brute I stood upon the step waiting for the door to open. Why could I not pass by this sheltered

nest, go on with my fiendish work leaving it unrifled? What could Leah say to me? What might I say to Leah? My hands were red. My feet dripped with blood. Yet, yet— Ah, I must see her. And raising the brass knocker I knocked again.

No answer came. Nothing stirred in the house. Where was she? What had happened? Hurriedly I left the step, crept round the house into the yard, and lifted the latch of the back door. It gave before me. I stepped into the kitchen; and there by the hearthstone, kneeling before a chair with her head buried in her arms, was Leah.

The fire was raked. A lamp was smoking over the hearth. In its corner a wag-o'-the-wall ticked noisily. In John's arm-chair a cat lay curled. On the table the supper plates and mugs were scattered, and by the dresser stood the porridge pot half filled with water. Not a sound save the tick of the clock was in the house. I thought Leah was asleep. Softly I stepped across the floor, bent over her and called her name—once, twice. And with that she raised her head, sat back upon her heels and knelt looking up at me.

A minute she stayed like that, not speaking but her eyes and face telling me much; then rose and faced me. "What do ye want?" she asked, her voice hard, face set and white, her grey eyes meeting mine like spear-points. Her black hair fell loose about her ears and was twisted behind into a knot. She wore a pink and white cotton bodice, a quilted black petticoat and unlaced shoes. Boldly she faced me on the hearthstone, her eyes loathing me; and

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"What do ye want?" she said, as to some tinker in his tatters.

What did I want? I could not find an answer, and my eyes fell.

"If it's father ye want, he's not here. He—he——" Leah stopped, a sob in her throat, dread in her eyes. I knew what she was thinking; but before I could tell her that we had not seen her father, she choked down her sob and went on. "If it's me ye want—" She stopped again; then drew herself up. "I'm ready," she said.

I stared at her. Was this Leah, she of the apple cheeks and kindly eyes? "Ready," said I. "For what?"

"For what?" Slowly she repeated the words; suddenly put both hands about her face. "Ah, my God, my God," she moaned. "What I've seen—what I've seen! All murdered in their sleep—all murdered on the hills—shot down like rats—like rats—like rats." She stood rocking upon the hearthstone, moaning and wailing; in a minute dropped her hands. "I'm ready," she said. "Bring in your butchers and let them do their worst. End it—end it. Ah, my God, my God," cried Leah again, and sank upon her knees before the chair and buried her head in her arms.

I stood perplexed, cold sweat on my face, my knees weak. How comfort Leah, how assure her? I went towards the door; stopped half way, came back and stood before the chair. "May I say a word?" said I. The moaning continued. "May I say a word?" said I again. The moaning went on. Then I stooped over the chair-back, laid a

hand on her shoulder ; and with that she shrank back and leaped to her feet.

"Ye dare," she cried. "Ye dare lay a hand upon me. You. You!"

Her scorn lashed me. I went to the table, leant against its edge, and unbuckled my cloak. "You're right," said I. "My hands might pollute you."

"Ah, if Jan was here," cried Leah. "If Jan was here."

That stung me. "Well, we'll go to Jan," I answered. "We promised to meet one day and the day has come. Maybe my hands are good enough for him ; but no matter about that now. What I want to say——"

"Ye need say nothing. Quick, quick. End this," cried Leah. "I'm ready."

I stepped from the table. "Look here," said I ; "you make me worse than I am. Our work is not with women. No woman has suffered at our hands to-night. What has happened is not our fault. We've been forced——"

"Forced," said Leah, quick and bitterly. "Forced to murder men and women in their sleep. Forced to chase innocent men down the hillside and shoot them on the lake. . . . Ah, my God, my God ! Can I ever forget the sight. Like rats—like rats !" And moaning, her face squeezed between her hands, Leah fell again to her rocking on the hearthstone, striving you might think to hide herself away from all the horrors she saw. Leah ? Could this be Leah, she of the apple cheeks and the merry laugh and the radiant eyes ?

What could I say, or do ? She was distraught.

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In my heart I pitied her, longed to comfort her ; yet there I stood helpless, spurned like any reptile. Silence fell in the kitchen, and through it in a minute came sound of hurrying feet in the yard, a rattle at the latch, a stumble at the threshold as Moran entered and came crouching over the floor with his rifle on his arm. Like an ogre he came shambling over the tiles, back hunched and knees bent, his narrow little eyes shining wickedly ; and at sight of him Leah shrank into a corner and stood still.

He came and stood by the chair between Leah and me. "Aren't ye comin'?" he whispered. "Man, is this the way you're wastin' good time? We'll be late, I tell ye; we'll be late. They'll have every throat cut if we don't make haste." He clutched my arm. "Come away. The boys are mad to get at them. I can keep them no longer. They're leapin' mad. Come away."

Should I go? I glanced at Leah in the corner ; then took Moran by the elbow and led him to the door. "Leave five men behind," said I. "Send them into the yard and send my horse with them. Take the rest and let them out. I'll catch you up soon."

He stopped at the threshold and looked up at me. "I can do what I like?" he said, his face a-quiver.

"Let them out," said I. "But go no further than Curleck bridge. And listen to me," I whispered ; "if you find John Hynes in your travels let him be. You understand me?"

"Surely—surely. Trust me, captain," said Moran, and like a sleuth-hound on the trail went loping across

the yard. Soon a wild burst of cheering and a rush of hooves in the road told me that the boys were loose; presently five troopers came into the yard and stopped before me. Bidding them wait, I closed the door, and went back to my place by the table.

Leah was still in the corner. I pulled the chair towards me and leant my arms across its back. "Well," I said; "are you still afraid of me? Do you still think I've come to hurt you?"

She answered nothing, only stood watching me with her big grey eyes, one hand along her cheek, the other hanging limp. With her white face and tousled hair, her knitted brow, her haunted expression, she looked weird and almost terrifying. What did she see? What was she thinking? Was this Leah of the sunny eyes?

"I've told you," I went on, "that you make me worse than I am. What we've done we've been forced to do. All I could, I strove to avoid bloodshed, but the others would have it. They resisted us. They shot us. Even now they're harrying the Catholics beyond there, and burning their houses. . . ." Leah's eyes had wandered from mine and were fixed on the door. "You hear me?" I asked.

Slowly her eyes came back to mine. "I hear ye," she said; then nodded towards the door. "Why don't ye bring in your butchers?"

My patience was giving out. I took my hat from the table and buckled my cloak. "Some day," I said, "you'll be sorry for this. Some day you'll understand that I came here to-night only to tell you that you were quite safe, and that John your father would be

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safe, and that all you had to do was to wait here quietly till he came back——”

Then Leah seemed to awake, and she freed her face and stepped upon the hearthstone. “Back,” she said, quick and scornfully. “Ye say the word to me an’ all the time ye know that he’s lyin’ dead somewhere. Ye say that! An’ ye talk to me of waitin’ here quietly till he comes—here in sight of all I’ve seen. Wait here? Wait here?” She stood a minute looking vacantly before her, in sight I suppose of all that she had seen that night and morning; then turned to me again. “End this,” she said. “Bring in your butchers an’ put me out of my misery. I’m ready. I’m ready.”

I stood looking at her, a strange notion big in my brain. Why should she wait there? Why should she not come with me? In a while, when she had found herself, when all was quiet again in Clackan, and work was done and I had seen Jan Farmer, she could come back. With me she would be safe; here anything might happen to her. I could reason with her on the way, could show her I was not the ruffian she thought I was; could let her see my power, and let her see me deal with the man Jan Farmer. Think of Jan’s discomfiture. Think of having her with me, a sweet prisoner from Clackan to Emo, a prisoner whom I could release at my pleasure when work was done. Perhaps I could carry her further than Emo and Stonegate. Perhaps—perhaps——

I decided. “Well then you shall not stay here,” said I. “We will go and see Jan Farmer together. Come, I give you five minutes to get ready.”

She stood frowning on the hearthstone, puzzled at

the change in me and not comprehending what I said ; but ready I could see to oppose me. So I came nearer and my voice grew harsher. "You don't understand. You are my prisoner, Miss Hynes. We're going to find your father and Jan Farmer. Get ready, I say." I paused. "Where's your mother?"

She did not answer ; and with that I crossed to the passage door and opened it. "Come. Find your mother and tell her to get ready. I'll wait for you here. Come," said I stamping my foot ; and slowly, like one walking in her sleep, she came over, passed through the doorway, and went up the stairs.

I heard her steps go along the landing, and the click of a door closing. Presently a sound of voices came down to me : Leah's low and clear, her mother's shrill and tearful : then shutting the passage door, I crossed the kitchen, took an oil lantern from the wall and lit it, and went out into the yard.

There the five troopers were waiting, all smoking and one holding my horse. With two of them I went to the stable, harnessed John's grey pony, put it in the shafts of the family gig, and led it round to the front door. Leaving it there in care of the troopers, I went back to the kitchen, hung the lantern on its nail, and sat down on the chair by the hearthstone.

Tick-tack went the wag-o'-the-wall in its corner. A cricket was shrilling on the hearth. The lamp was bobbing with a little popping sound and throwing shadows on the dresser. The cat awoke and stretched itself on John's arm-chair. At intervals I heard the horses moving outside, or voices upstairs ; and from

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Curleck came a dull noise of turmoil, shots, skirls, the jangle of bells. Presently the sound of voices grew clearer, I heard feet moving on the landing and the stairs ; and with that I rose, opened the passage door and stood waiting near it.

Leah came first, dressed in black with a cloak about her and the hood over her head. Behind came her mother, in black also and wrapped in a woollen shawl. Both were pale ; but Leah stood erect before me with folded hands, whilst her mother stood trembling and wet with tears.

"You're ready then," said I as cheerfully as I might. "Well, so are we. You'll find the pony and gig in front. Is there anything you want to do before you go?"

Leah did not answer ; but her mother fell to sobbing. "Ah," she moaned, "spare us. Spare us, good Lord."

"You'll get no hurt from us, Mrs Hynes," I answered. "You'll be safer with me than here. But may I suggest, as the morning is cold, that you had better have a rug or two. I can find them if you will tell me where they are."

"We want nothing. Do your worst with us," said Leah ; but her mother continued wailing. "Ah, John, John. Where are ye, John? Are ye dead, me man ; are ye dead? Ah, good Lord, good Lord." Of a sudden she tottered forward and fell on her knees before me, with clasped and uplifted hands. "Spare us," she pleaded. "Don't, don't."

"You'll get no hurt, Mrs Hynes. When all is safe I'll send you back home. Come. Let me help you." I put a hand to help her ; but Leah interposed. "Don't touch her," she said, her eyes fierce upon me.

"Come, mother. Get up, I say." She pulled her mother to her feet; then turned to me. "Do your worst. We're ready."

I said no more. Crossing the hall I opened the front door, saw them pass out and climb into the gig; then pulled the door behind me, mounted my horse, and gave the word to march. In front went four troopers; by the gig went the fifth leading the pony with one hand and his horse with the other; behind rode myself. So down the lane past the orchard and haggard we went, out through the gateway upon the road and turned towards Curleck. And going I thought of that night, nearly four weeks before, when Leah walked with me along the lane and refused me at the gateway. Suppose she had not refused me that night? Where in such case would Red Shaw be now, where and in what plight the Armoy commando? Fate? Had she been my fate that night and the fate of others? Was she still my fate and the fate of others?

In silence we went along the narrow roadway; on that side lough Erne glistening afar, on this Clackan lake lying among the hills with the cot drifting black and grim upon it, in front the glow of burning cottages hiding the woods of Curleck. Everything was quiet now upon the country-side, hushed to sleep it might be in gleam of the moon. The drums and the bells had ceased. No sound of voice or rifle came from Lackan and Emo behind us, or from Gorteen beyond the lough; and from the direction of Curleck, where the cottages were burning, came no more than a shout at times or a murmur of voices. Was work over? Had Moran and the boys wiped out the harrying Protestants?

FROM MIDNIGHT TO DAWN III

Eager to know what had happened and anxious to spare Leah what I could, in a hollow of the road I stopped the gig. "You'll be safe here," I said to the women. "Soon I'll come back to you." Neither answered me ; so leaving the troopers to guard them I galloped on.

It took me short time to know what had happened. Over all Ireland no wilder work had been done than in that little Catholic colony of Clackan. From all sides, from Clackan and Curleck, a few from Lackan and Derryvad, a few even from Innishrath and Louth, the Protestants to sound of drum and bell had rushed in and harried it sore. Raging and vengeful they had come, armed with musket and rifle and bayonet, and like wolves in a sheep-fold had ravaged. To none, to woman or child, had they shown mercy. The cottages had blazed behind them and the byres with the beasts in the stalls. Here and there the Catholics (ancients and youths most of them, for the best were on commando beyond the lough) had stood at bay, in cottage and haggard, behind ditch and wall, here and there had charged despairingly with scythe and sickle; but always had they gone down at last before the Protestants, had died and been trampled on the fields. We found them lying in lane and road, on the doorstep, in the yard, in ditch and pasture ; lying like shadows in the moonlight, sometimes with a Protestant slashed beside them, or a dead child, or a murdered woman. Of the men none had escaped. Of the women and children only a few were left alive among the ditches, cowering there like hunted hares, when Moran thundered down and let loose the boys. Then was sweet doing among the Protestants.

"Man," said Moran to me as he sat on his mule in view of the blazing cottages, the while the boys scoured the fields in frantic search of friend or foe; "Man," said Moran and smiled his grimmest, "we burst on them like thunderclaps from the sky an' scattered them like chaff. *Whish* we went like hell's fire, every throat in us crackin' with a shout an' the blood boilin' in us to the lips—an'—an'——" Moran smiled again, the smile of a brave who has scalps at his belt. "Not many o' them will say their prayers this mornin'," said he; then with a hand stroking his chin fell to sober musing, his eyes pensive, his voice a little sad. "I seen one get to the lake; an' *he* got off. I seen two get across the hill there; but they might as well have stayed. Two more made for the bridge beyond an' the cots in the drain, but I misdoubt they're in Kingdom come by this. Another took to his heels up the slope there; I turned in the saddle and gave him a pill, and he tumbled like a child when it trips. Yis. He did. . . ."

Moran stopped, pondered a minute, turned to me. "Man, if ye had only come straight on," he plained. "If ye had only even let us out sooner! We might have caught them all—we might, we might—an' surely we'd have been able to save some of our own. Ah, man, man, why didn't ye?" moaned Moran, his voice piteous with regret.

What could I answer? Why had I not let the boys loose sooner? Why had I stood there in the kitchen trembling before Leah the scorner, heedless of all that was happening among the cottages; scorned by her yet helpless at her feet? Was it fate again,

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and was Leah fate? I looked up. "God knows, Moran," was all I could answer him.

"Ay. I'm thinkin' maybe He does. He knows a lot this night—aw, a powerful lot." Moran reflected a while; turned again. "How was it we forgot that this massaccree might happen?" asked he, sweeping an arm round the cottages. "Sure in a way 'twas bound to happen."

"It was, Moran," I answered. "We ought to have foreseen it. But I suppose we were too sure."

"That's it, Shaw. We were too sure." Moran lifted his hat and looked at the sky. "Well, God have mercy on all the innocents, an' God forgive us if their blood's on our head." He crossed himself, put on his hat; turned quickly. "You'll make the prisoners pay for this, Shaw?" said he, his rosary changed to a halter whilst you might wink an eye.

I sat staring at Moran, amazed something at the sudden change in him. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"Mean? If 'twas me I'd give a pill to every man o' them before sunrise. Aw, be the piper, would I. An' I'd burn every house belongin' to them, an' I'd make their women and children pay, an' I'd——"

I stopped him there. "Enough," said I; "thank heaven it's not you. Man, man, have you no bowels?" He sat looking at me, his fangs bared. "Have you seen Hynes?" I asked, my thought back with Leah.

"Naw," he answered. "I haven't. But I might if I searched."

"Then search. Gather the dead, call in the men

and get ready to march. The wounded will come with us." And turning I went to fetch the gig.

It was standing where I had left it, the pony dozing in the shafts, the two black figures huddled together on the seat; Leah rigid as stone and her face white within the hood, Susan shivering and moaning. "Ah, Lord, Lord," went the moan. "Ah, John, John. Where are ye, me man; where are ye, me man?"

"I think he's safe, Mrs Hynes. No one has seen him. I've given orders to search for him, and to——" No word of mine could stop the moaning, none move that stony face within the hood. "Drive on," said I, and took my place behind the gig.

Up hill we went, and past the burning cottages, and out through the plantation across the fields, and down over the wooden bridge into Curleck. There on the road Moran and his men were waiting, the wounded lying on doors and hurdles, the women kneeling on the wayside with the children clinging to their skirts. "Whisht now," said a trooper now and then. "Ah, whisht, woman dear. Sure what's the use o' cryin' now; sure what's the use." But the keening continued, and as we passed I saw bare arms uplifted in tragic appeal to the stars. And unceasingly went the moan in the gig: "Ah, John, me man; John, me man, where are ye?" I asked Moran if he had found John, and hearing that he had not I told Susan that her man so far was safe. She looked at me; shook her head and renewed her moaning. So leaving the gig in charge of the five I turned away.

At top of the hill, just by Curleck wood, was a long white house—the home last night of Welsh the

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gamekeeper, now empty and cold with Welsh dead I suppose and his family out in the woods—and in that I left the dead and the women and children, with my trusty O’Hea to guard them. “Do your best, Dan,” said I. “As soon as possible you’ll have help and relief. Put sentries round the house. Keep your eyes open and send word to Emo if anything happens.”

“Right, captain,” answered Dan ; and we started for Emo.

It was now past three o’clock. The moon was falling. Soon dawn would break. In open order, from Thrasna river on our left to Clackan lake on our right, we swept over Curleck, Moran leading and myself following the gig through the oak plantation along the road. Every house was empty in Curleck ; not a man did we find in the outskirts of Lackan ; and when at last we came to Emo house it too stood empty on the hilltop, Jan gone, the Master gone, and all the women. We searched the outhouses, the haggard, the fir plantations, scoured the fields, beat the willows along Thrasna river, searched the labourers’ cottages and the big house itself from kitchen to garret ; and all without avail. It was strange enough ; strange too to find the house ransacked and the yard in disorder. Pots and pans, dishes and plates, stools and chairs, had been cleared from the kitchen ; mattresses and bed-clothes were gone from the bedrooms ; we found no arms, no ammunition, no food ; only the parlours, sweet and clean with the dawn breaking into them, had escaped pillage. Even the horses and carts were gone, many cattle from the fields, and the dogs and fowls from the yard.

What had happened? Who had been there? Where had gone Jan and the Master? I felt uneasy (for I knew that neither was the man to run); so leaving Leah and Susan in the kitchen, with word to them that all the house was at their service, and leaving Moran with fifty men in charge of Emo, I went down the road and up to Stonegate. And as we went the sun rose over Ireland.

Slane and his men were at Stonegate, some sleeping on the roadside, some yawning in the saddle, all weary and haggard. "All well, Slane?" said I.

"The best, captain," answered he; "only tired a bit."

"Work done?"

"Ay, it's done. Sure we had no trouble at all, 'cept yonder across the lake. There weren't ten men this side of the barricade—nothin' but a horse or two an' a gun or two an' the women and children. 'Twas easy as walkin'; but—Well, I'm thinkin' it's strange."

"Yes. It is strange, Slane. Where are they, do you think? They couldn't be between here and the river?"

"Ah, not at all. Sure where could they be except lyin' on the bare hills? An' they're not in the River house, I know, for we've been to see."

"Have you? Perhaps they've gone across to Bilboa?"

"No," said Slane with a laugh. "Faith, they've not. They'd get small welcome there."

"And you haven't seen anything of Jan Farmer or the Master?"

"Not a sign," said Slane.

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"And you or the boys haven't been ransacking the big house?"

"'Deed we haven't, captain. Sure we left that for you."

"Strange, it's very strange. . . . Well, never mind now. Send word to Christy to bring up the prisoners when his men have rested, to take them into Bunn and to hurry back with all the stores he can carry and what news he can gather. You'll take your men down to the River house and quarter them there. Rest them, but set guards on the bridge and round the house. If anything happens, report to me, but act if needs be. And always remember, Slane, that the Farmers are still out."

"I'll be mindin'. Good luck to ye, captain," said Slane; and with that we parted, he and his men to the house by the bridge, I and my men to the big house on Emo hill.

It was now broad morning and in it the land lay peaceful. Turmoil and strife had died out; all was fresh and sweet in the young sunshine. Birds sang in the hedges, mists filled the valleys; there stood the hills with cattle upon them and white houses nestling amid the orchards and poplars. Here in Emo was no sign of ravage, no sound of lamentation, no trace of bloodshed. Trampled Gorteen lay far beyond the hills; Clackan and its smouldering cottages were hidden away; over Lackan the sun was streaming graciously, gleaming on the empty houses and warming the dead that lay on the roadside down near the little bridge. Dead and wounded, heart-broken women and orphaned children, houses empty or burnt or filled with woe; hard to believe that the sun had risen

upon these and that the birds were singing around them. Was it all some ugly dream, all that havoc of the dark ; some nightmare from which I should gratefully awake ? Ah, no, no. It was all true. Gorteen was a wilderness. Clackan was red ruin. The dark had been filled with havoc. And there went I, riding through the sunshine with the birds singing around me, splattered with blood and weary with spoiling—Red Shaw, in grim truth, of the Red Leaguers. Yes ; and up there Leah sat in her cloak, and somewhere Jan Farmer was hiding, and over Ireland from shore to shore the sun was looking upon—What ? Upon how many dead was it shining, how many empty houses, how many blood-trampled fields ? What was before us in this new day ? Should I find the Master, should I meet Jan ?

At Emo I found everything quiet. In the hayshed, in the byre, the men lay sleeping ; in the yard the horses stood round piles of hay ; by the kitchen doorway sat Moran on a stool, smoking peacefully, his rifle leaning against the wall, an empty porringer standing between his feet. He watched me coming across the yard, his eyes like beads under the slouch of his hat. "It's a brave mornin', Shaw," said he with a nod.

"It is," answered I. "Is everything right ?"

"Aw, ay. The lads are snorin'. The horses are fed. I'm just takin' a quiet smoke meself here in the sunshine." He sighed, looked round at the mountain and back across the yard ; sighed again. "Man, but it's the beautiful mornin'. Ay. Sure it's great." Like any lamb Moran basked himself in the sunshine, and his voice was soft. "Sure it's great," said he.

I felt inclined to laugh at the man—at this bleating

fox—but I restrained myself. “You haven’t set guards, I see.”

He waved his pipe stem. “Divil a one, Shaw, but meself. Aw, never heed, boy. I’ll keep awake; an’ what I don’t see won’t be worth lookin’ for. . . . But tell me, now. Have ye found the Farmers? No. Well, that’s curious. But all’s well with Slane, I’m hopin’? Ay. Sure thank God for that, now. Well, well, sure we can’t complain. It’s been a brave night’s work, so it has. I wish to God I had to go through it again; an’, man alive, if we’d only come on them devils sooner! But never heed; there’s sport before us yet. Away in, Shaw, an’ take a sleep. I’ll keep an eye on things. An’ whisht now,” said Moran jerking a thumb across his shoulder. “Themselves are gone upstairs. They were unwillin’, but I persuaded them.” He cocked his fox’s eye at me. “But tell me, Shaw. What in glory have ye carried them here for?”

“That’s my business, Moran, if you please,” said I. “You used no violence with them, I hope?”

“Aw, divil an ounce,” answered he with a grin. “But I had me rifle on me arm, an’ maybe the glint o’ me eye was hard—anyway, they went. They’re in the big room over the parlour. Well, sweet sleep to ye, captain, an’ don’t be worryin’, for I’ll keep an eye on things.”

I went across the kitchen, upstairs to top of the house, and flung myself on some car cushions that I found in a little room. At my feet, tacked upon the wall, was an illuminated text: “*Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.*” On the sloping ceiling above me was scrawled in pencil: “*Jan Farmer, June 19th,*

1900." At intervals a sound of moaning came up to me, and a low sound of pleading.

June 19. Was that Jan's birthday? . . . Was that Leah's voice? Leah's—Leah's—Leah's. . . . *Wash me and I—wash me and I—whiter—whiter.* . . .

Gradually my thoughts blurred and faded; then melted into sleep.

CHAPTER VII

A MASTER STROKE

ABOUT ten o'clock Moran and Slane came tramping into the room and woke me. Both looked excited. They sat down on the edge of an iron bedstead that stood against the wall, watched me yawn and stretch ; then glanced at each other. "The word's with you," said Slane. And Moran leant over his knees towards me.

"We've found them," he said. "The whole jing-bang."

I sat upright. "Who?"

"Why, Ted Farmer an' Jan an' all the rest. Ay, the whole jing-bang. Where d'ye think they are?" He stretched an arm. "Beyond there in Rhamus in the ould castle on the hill. They've been there all night, preparin' an' trenchin' themselves in. They've cattle with them, an' horses, an' carts, an' hay, an' turf, an' the devil knows what. They're swarmin' in it like bees, an' workin' like mad. I've seen them meself. Slane here's seen them. Ye can see the ruts where the carts went up. They've got a big ditch facin' the plantation, an' the carts behind it, an' the cattle behind them, an'—Aw, man, they're there," said Moran throwing up his hands ; "they're there. We've got them, Shaw. Get up till we bang them. Get up, I say."

I sat upon the car cushions, looking at Moran and my thoughts in a whirl. In Rhamus castle? The Master and Jan and the whole jing-bang? "Who found them?" I asked.

"'Twas Slane," said Moran. "He got word. He'd been scoutin' about, an' they fired on him. Come, Shaw; come, man, till we bang them."

Moran rose, but I sat on. "Tell me, Slane," said I.

"I will," answered Slane; "but sure there's little to tell. An hour ago I was woke by one o' the boys bringin' word that someone was wantin' to see me. I went out, an' a man was in the yard—a man that lives beyond near the river. He said that in the night he was prowlin' about in search of sport, and saw the carts come in from Lackan an' Emo, and go up to the castle on Rhamus. They began to come early, about the time I suppose we were busy in Gorteen, an' continued comin' till after three o'clock. He says there must have been forty or more. They had hay an' beds in them, an' turf, an' everything you could think of; and a few women an' children came; an' they drove in cattle; an' two or three times the carts came back here to Emo; an' Jan Farmer on a black horse went skitin' about the country, an' the Master rode a chestnut mare, an' he ordering everything an' everybody——"

"Why didn't he tell us at once, Slane?" I asked.

"He was afraid," said Slane. "'How did I know but I'd meet one o' them and get a bullet?' said he. 'An' how did I know that yourselves could tell t'other from which?' said he——"

"Go on, Slane," said I.

"Well, I questioned him an' listened to all he had

to say ; then slipped through the fields, an' went joukin' along the hedges up towards the castle to see for myself. I saw little enough, for, as you know yourself, the walls are high on the river side; but I heard plenty. I could hear the spades an' shovels goin' on the trenches, I could hear the Master givin' his orders, an' Jan swearin' like a fish-wife, an' the women talkin', an' a child cryin'; an' says I at last to myself, 'They're so busy up yonder, Michael, sure they'll never heed you.' So with that I tries to creep nearer—an' next thing was a flash in one o' the turrets an' a bullet by my ear. Then I crept no more, captain. Thinks I, 'You'll be teachin' school in heaven, Michael Slane, if you don't shift from Rhamus hill.' So down I goes wrigglin' on my stomach in the ditch, comes back to the River house an' puts O'Gorman in charge; then makes a circuit round by the river, for the road's not safe I'm fearin', comes to Stonegate an' there meets Moran. 'What's up?' says he. 'Was it you fired that shot, Michael?' 'Twas not, Patrick,' I answers. 'Twas one o' the Outlanders in Rhamus castle.' 'What!' shouts Moran, leapin' that high. . . ."

I was sorry; but just then I wanted Slane's news and not his digressions. "Easy, lad," said I. "Let Moran leap some other time. What did you do when talking was over?"

"Just stepped into the plantation to see what we could do on that side o' the hill," answered Slane, somewhat sulkily.

"Yes. And what did you see, Michael?"

"Aw, just the same as Moran, I misdoubt; the same he's after tellin' you, captain."

I saw that I had stroked Slane the wrong way (and

what Irishman, indeed, comes cheerfully to the path from sauntering in the meadows?); so withholding further questions I rose, crossed to the window, flung it up, and leaning out across the sill, looked over Emo bog in the direction of Rhamus castle.

The day had grown clouded, with a low sky and a promise of rain; but from the window, despite the distance and the gloom and the intervening hedges, I had fair sight of the grey castle on its rounded hilltop. Part of the wall on the Emo side, the ivy-grown turret that looked upon Bilboa, and the hedge that ran from the wall towards the oak plantation, I saw distinctly; but the carts and trench that Moran had seen were hidden from me, nor could I catch sight of man or beast moving within hedge and wall. All was quiet around it, lonely and pastoral, with the long hedges stretching down and horses grazing among the rushes. Inwards, the oak plantation lay black above Emo bog. Outwards, across the river valley, stood the hills of Bilboa with the spire of Bunn church rising beyond them. Below and back away to Curleck, ran Thrasna river, winding among the meadows and pastures and hills on its way to Lough Erne. And there on its hilltop stood Rhamus castle, grim and silent, squat and grey, frowning against the sky as always in cloud or sun it had frowned for centuries back, down from the ancient days when some marauding plantation lord dug deep its foundations and set it there as menace to the country-side—a ruin now with ivy and briar on its walls, grass deep on its floors, whitethorns springing in its courtyard, and boor trees from its battered portal; but a ruin filled again with life after so many quiet centuries and frowning defiance once more across

Emo valley. Ay, frowning defiance once more ; and now at Red Shaw and his Red commando.

So. With elbows on the sill and face resting on my hands I leant through the window, looking towards Rhamus and thinking hard. This then was the Master's answer to our challenge ; this Jan's way of receiving his enemy. Had it all been planned beforehand ; or was it all the result of a quick stroke on the Master's part when the drums beat the alarm in Gorteen ? No, no. The Master had been ready ; surprised of course but always ready. I knew it. I remembered our interview on that Sunday afternoon. His words and his look came back to me. He had suspected me, had known something ; had been waiting for trouble, these weeks back, with all his plans prepared. How else could he have been so quick ; how done so much in so short a time ? It needed but a word of warning through the dark ; and there was he ready for the word, the house astir in a minute, the yard bustling with preparation, Jan on his black horse dashing from door to door about the country-side ; there went the laden carts from Emo, there came the laden carts one by one along the road ; there, in two hours, even as we broke the barricade and went hurrying across Clackan, was Rhamus castle filled again with life and turmoil, provisioned, garrisoned, defiant. By heavens, it was a great achievement. I gave to the Master tribute of my praise ; had pride in him as a man and a foe. Suppose, thought I, he had been warned sooner ? Suppose, thought I, he had met us at the barricade ?

Could he hold Rhamus ? How many men had he ? Had he rifles and ammunition ? Was there water on

the hill? Had he much food? Had he laid in stores beforehand? How many women and children were with him? Was he prepared to bid us defiance for long; or did he hope that in a day or two Red Shaw and his men would be facing the soldiers of England; or was it that he imagined Red Shaw would slink away without a shot, helpless and afraid? Afraid. Ah, by the Lord, I would show him. I'd have a try at those defences of his. I'd make Rhamus hum with snarling bullets. "Wait a little, Teddy, my boy. Wait awhile, Jan, my lad," said I across the window-sill; then drew back into the little room.

Moran and Slane sat waiting on the bed, Moran watchful as a terrier at a cornstack, Slane stolid and sullen with his eyes on his boots. I crossed and stood before them. "Has Christy gone in with the prisoners, Slane?" said I. He did not answer. "I'm speaking to you, Slane." He did not stir. I had the impulse to take him by the throat and shake the foolishness out of his bullet head; but I resisted it. Instead, I stooped and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Slane, my lad," said I, "you're not fair to me. Have you so short a memory, Michael, that you forget already how I helped you last night at the barricade? Eh, Michael?"

He sat quiet a minute; then slowly looked up, his eyes softened and a quiver in his long lip. "It's true, captain," said he, penitent now as a child. "Man, it's true. Sure I'm a sweep." He jumped to his feet. "You'll forgive me, captain," he pleaded. "Ah, you will."

"That's all right, Michael. But next time I'll hit you. And now tell me about Christy."

"He's gone in, captain, ridin' on the big cart-horse

like a lord, an' all the prisoners with him." Slane was all sunshine now and voluble again. "He went an hour ago. I thought at first they'd fire on him from the castle, but they didn't, maybe because their own were the prisoners. When I told him what had happened he wheeled on the road an' waved his hat an' shouted, 'We're comin', Teddy, we're comin'. I'll keep a place for ye in Bunn,' shouts he; an' the lads skirled, an' Christy laughed, an' away they went."

"Were the prisoners quiet?"

"Ah, they were. Sure empty stomachs have little fight in them, an' the poor devils looked more than hungry. Such a tribe o' ragamuffins! Two by two they went trampin', an' their faces hangin' ashamed. Ah, I pitied them."

"Ay. Ye pitied them," barked Moran from the bed. "I wonder ye didn't fill their stomachs with sweet milk. The pack o' cut-throats! Be jabbers, if I had me way it's over the bridge into the river they'd go to fill their stomachs."

I stood smiling at Moran, thinking of the bleat he had had at sunrise that morning, wondering what really might happen if he had his way. "Has word gone to Dr Sheehan?" I said to Slane.

"It has, captain. He's comin' when he gets time. Sure his hands are full yonder at the bridge."

"Yes, I suppose they are, Slane," mused I, my eyes on the bridge and on trampled Gorteen and the burnt cottages down near Curleck; "and they'll be full this many an hour."

"Ay, troth will they," barked Moran from the bed, "when we've wiped out the varmin on the hill above."

Aren't we goin', Shaw? Man, dear, what's the good o' this clackin'? Get at them, Shaw; get at them."

"All in good time, Moran. Wait till I get my breakfast. Has any news come in?" I said to Slane.

"Naw. Only rumours. They say there's sport beyond at Louth castle. They're talkin' about hard work Lismahee way across the lake. I hear that diversion is goin' in Bunn. But—" Slane puckered up his face and shook his head. "Ah, it's only granny's talk," said he. "Wait till Christy comes."

"True, Slane," said I. "Well, get back to the bridge, lad. Set a guard on the river bank, set another at Stonegate, and keep a sharp eye on Rhamus. We'll watch this side. Be ready for orders. Keep the men in hand. And report news at once."

That ended our talk in Jan's bedroom. Taking my hat and cloak from the floor, I led the way down the narrow stairs and came to the landing that looks through two windows out across Emo lawn. At top of the lower flight of stairs a tall clock was ticking solemnly. In the window recesses were flower-boxes filled with geraniums, fuchsias, ferns. At further end of the landing a door stood ajar, giving sight of a carpeted room with pictures on the walls and a book-shelf in a corner. On my left, as I looked upon the lawn, was another door; but it was shut tight with the key inside. Behind that door were Leah and Susan her mother. "Go on down, boys. I'll be with you soon," said I over my shoulder. And without answering Slane and Moran went tramping down into the hall and into the kitchen. "He's bewitched," I heard

Moran muttered. "What, in heaven's name, has he brought *them* here for?"

I stood looking upon the lawn and asking myself Moran's question. Why, in heaven's name, had I brought them here? I could only answer with Moran, that I had been bewitched.

Why keep them longer, now that work was nearly done, now that Jan had gone, now that I was balked in my great scheme of triumph? I had hoped to stand triumphing between Leah and Jan, prisoners both, and both in my power. I had hoped to see Jan's face and to say a word to him. . . .

Well, and could I not still have my word? I had but to keep Leah for a day or two, perhaps for only a few more hours, and I should see Jan's face and say my word, should see Leah's face and hear her moan. Cruel? Ah, and had not she been cruel. "*The same God,*" she had said, "*never made you and Jan Farmer.*" And last night she had scorned me, called me butcher and defied me.

Think of her being there beyond the door. Ah, my King, if she would only—only— Fool. She would never smile upon me again. Yet, even if she scorned me, even if she could never smile upon me again; still it was good to have her near me, my sweet prisoner of war.

Was she there? I went on tiptoe along the landing, came to the door and stood listening by it. Not a sound came to me. I raised my hand to knock; lowered it and stole back to the window; came again to the door, listened a minute, then knocked twice on a panel, drew back a step and stood waiting. No answer came. Again I knocked twice

on the panel and called softly: "Mrs Hynes—Mrs Hynes. I want to speak to you."

Still no answer and no sound. I beat upon the panel. "Mrs Hynes," I called. "Mrs Hynes, I want to speak to you."

I heard voices within, then a sound of shuffling feet and of voices again. She was there, then. I drew back, satisfied now and inclined to go; but I kept myself from going. Presently I heard something heavy being moved from the door; then the key turned in the lock, slowly the door opened, and Mrs Hynes stood before me. She was fully dressed, but her hair was tousled and her face was forlorn. In one night she had aged ten years.

"Good morning, ma'am," I said, cheerfully as I might. "I hope you have slept well?"

She stood looking at me, fear striving with misery in her eyes, her shoulders bent and hands clenched upon her breast. "Sleep," she answered wearily. "Sleep? Ah, no, no!"

I pitied her much. I felt constrained before her. "Well, never mind, Mrs Hynes. Make yourselves as comfortable as you can, and soon everything will be right again. You are quite safe here. You—you—I just wanted to say, Mrs Hynes, that the house is at your service. Go where you like and do what you like. No one will molest you, I promise. I don't think there's much food to be had at present, but we'll soon have plenty and—and——" I found it hard to speak, for the woman's eyes hurt me and I knew that Leah was listening. "The house is just at your service, ma'am," I repeated and was for turning away. But quickly she stepped out upon the

landing, pulled the door close, and caught me by an arm.

"Tell me," she said in a broken whisper. "You're not going to hurt *her*?" And she looked sideways at the door.

"Hurt," I protested. "My God, no. Why, it's to save her from being hurt that I've——" The lie would not come. "I've told you, Mrs Hynes, that you both are quite safe here."

"But—but—" Feverishly she clutched at my arm. "What are ye goin' to do with us? Aren't ye goin' to send us home?"

I thought a moment before answering. "Yes, Mrs Hynes, I'm going to send you home—presently when it's safe to send you. Wait till——" I paused; and with that she plucked at my arm.

"What?" she cried. "Wait till what? Haven't ye—haven't ye——?" She choked, but I read the question in her eyes.

"No," said I, "we haven't found him yet. But we will soon. I promise you. And when we do then he'll come and take you home. Come now, Mrs Hynes, doesn't that satisfy you? Can't you trust me now for a day or two?"

She let go my arm and moved away. "Ah, yes," she said. "But—but—" Her hands went up to her face and tears came. "Ah, John, me man, where are ye?" she moaned; then slowly turned from me, went into the room, and closed and locked the door.

I found the big smoke-browned kitchen full of troopers, some sprawling on the table, some on the dresser shelf, some on stools and chairs, a few stretched on sacks along the wall, a few hunkered in

corners and sleeping fast. Near the door one sat plucking a goose. By the window another was splicing his bridle. On the hearth another was building turf under a pot of potatoes. Before the fire sat Moran, knees crossed and his black pipe going. The room reeked of tobacco smoke and was stifling hot. As I entered there fell a sudden hush, some of the men scrambled to their feet and Moran twisted round his face. I judged from his look and from the furtive eyes of the men that they had been discussing me and my affairs.

"Well, boys," I said. "You seem to be making yourselves at home. This is better diversion, I'm thinking, than hunting Protestants on the hills."

"Aw, it is, captain," came back from one and another. "Sure it's a change, anyway, captain. But sure as day, captain," said Ned Fitch by the dresser, "it'd be more like home if so be we had a brewin' o' good tay between us."

"Or a brewin' o' poteen, Ned? Eh?" said I, with my eyes on a jar that stood on the table.

"Aw, it'd do," drawled Ned. "But sure so would the Congo, captain."

"Anyway, you've got the spuds," I said and nodded at the bubbling pot. "And that goose won't go to loss, I'm of opinion, when Phil there has stripped its pelt. Deal tenderly with it, Phil, my son; it's a relation, mind."

"Aw, the devil a relation then," answered Phil through the laughter. "Sure it's a Protestant born."

"And a Protestant dead with half its feathers in your hair." There was more laughter at that; but I turned from it, stepped to the hearthstone, and set

my back to the fire. "I'm glad to see you all so comfortable, boys," I said; "but I don't know if Moran has been telling you that this is my headquarters."

The faces fell glum, and silence held the kitchen.

"I'm not wishful to disturb you," I went on. "But you wouldn't see your captain make his headquarters in the stable? Come, Phil, take your Protestant goose to the yard. Now, my lads." And one by one the troopers slouched out, and left the kitchen to Moran and me.

He sat looking up at me, legs still crossed and a finger hooked round his pipe stem. "That's quick," said he with a nod. "They'll like ye the better for it."

"Maybe they'll respect me for it, Moran, and maybe you'll respect me too before your pipe's out. Come, sir, get to your feet." Slowly he uncrossed his legs, slowly rose. "Now tell me what you were saying to the men when I opened the door."

He stood hunched by the chair, head forward and eyes hard upon me. "Tellin'," he said. "An' what would I be tellin' to them?" He paused; suddenly straightened himself. "I was sayin', Shaw, that it'd be the better for you an' us an' Ireland if women had no hand in our transactions."

"I see. I thought as much. And what business is it of yours, Quartermaster Moran?"

"Ah, but it just is, captain Shaw," he broke in. "D'ye think it contents me to see ye confabbin' with women, an' wastin' your time with them, when there's work still to be done, when there's work waitin' for us yonder on the hill? D'ye think I don't know an' don't see? Tell me, Shaw," said Moran stepping

towards me. "What have ye brought them here for? What business, in heaven's name, have ye with them *now?*"

I had a mind to hit the fox between the eyes. He was insolent, he was presuming: yes, but he was right. "That's my business, Quartermaster," I answered.

"Ay, an' be the Lord it's mine. Look ye, Shaw," said Moran coming close. "You're captain here, an' last night ye did well, an' I'll give ye respect so long as ye are captain; but let me tell ye that Ireland's more to me than all the women in it, an' sooner than see ye fail her I'd—I'd——"

"What, Moran? Go on, my man."

"By the eternal King, I'd put a hole in your khaki coat for ye. I would so," snarled Moran.

Who would not be leader of a Red commando? Think of the diversions I was having with these wags of Hillsiders. See Slane sulking on the bed, see Susan wailing on the landing, see the troopers sporting in my headquarters; now here was Moran threatening me to my face. But I knew how to handle even Moran. Without answering him a word, I drew out my revolver and held its butt towards him.

He looked at it; slowly raised his eyes. "Eh?" he stammered. "What's—what's that?"

"I'm ready and willing, Moran," I answered. "Make your hole, man; make your hole."

He drew back, his eyes widening; of a sudden broke out. "Ah, be the Lord, you'd try the patience of a saint. You're as full of whims as a woman." He swept an arm towards me. "Put your pop-gun out o' me sight," he shouted. "Ye make me sick.

Man, d'ye think I meant what I said!" He stood a minute looking at the whiskey jar; turned slowly and eyed me sorrowfully. "Shaw, I didn't think it of ye; be me soul, I didn't. Sure I could cry this minute. An' me only warnin' ye, only tellin' ye what we all expect of ye!"

It was the absurdest thing. I wished Moran would cry that minute. "All right, Patrick," I said, smiling in spite of myself. "Let us leave it at that, then. And now, like a man, tell me what's troubling you?"

"Divil a mortal thing this minute, Shaw, but your own self. For I'm 'shamed of ye, so I am."

"And I'm 'shamed of myself, Patrick. But come, now. What's troubling you about the women?"

"Just themselves. What are they here for?"

"Because—" I nodded towards Rhamus. "Because someone I don't care for is yonder, Moran."

He stood staring at me, the while a dry grin spread over his face. "I see. Why to be sure, now. It's to spite Jan?"

Was it to spite Jan? Had Moran found the reason? Perhaps not; but it would serve. I nodded. "Yes, it's to spite Jan"; and with that Moran came stepping to me with outstretched hand, admiration shining in his eyes. "Not a word, now, but leave it there. Leave it there, Shaw," said he. "Dang me, but you're a hero."

I took Moran's hand. He made me sit down, brought me bread and meat from the cart outside and whiskey in a mug. "Eat, captain," he bleated; "sure ye must be starvin'. Come now, fill up, I bid ye." I thanked Moran and began filling up. He drew a stool to the hearthstone, lighted his pipe, and

with his back to the chimney jamb sat watching me, that dry grin still on his ogre's face, that admiring look in his foxy eyes. And seeing him there I smiled to myself and asked : Who would not be hero to the Quartermaster of a Hillside commando ?

Breakfast done we went out into the big yard that lay behind the offices. There all was life and bustle, laughter and diversion. To see the men and to hear them, one would never think that dead lay in Armoy and Gorteen and that women were weeping even then among the hills. Here a group were playing cards in a shed. There a cluster were playing pitch and toss on the stones. Down the yard a game of leap frog was in progress ; against the barn wall four were playing handball ; in the haggard a crowd was watching a contest at putting the stone (for half-a-crown a side and the championship of Armoy) between Phil O'Hara and Mick M'Grane. In the byre Phil Trant was plucking his Protestant goose. On the barn loft some were singing ballads, or telling stories, or sleeping in the straw. Saddles and bridles were piled in the turf-house, and rifles hung on the wall. The stables and the byre were full of horses ; a few were grazing in the haggard, the rest on the open fields. With Moran I went the rounds, speaking a friendly word to one and another and bidding all keep themselves ready for work ; then started alone down the road towards Stonegate to have a closer look at Rhamus.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LION'S DEN

THE day had worn greyer. Over the land the sky hung low and threatening. From the direction of Bunn a warm wind came piping through the hedges its message of rain. Near the bog-pass I met Dr Sheehan in his tax-cart and stopped him for news. He had done what he could in Armoy. All of the dead had been taken from the roadside near Lackan bridge, but a few were still waiting for the women in M'Avey's yard. There had been trouble, he feared, beyond the lake near Lismahee. Enniskillen, people said, was holding out, and Louth castle was full of fugitive Protestants. No; he had not been to Gorteen. Yes; he was going straight down to Curleck. "I'm tired, Shaw," he said. "I'd give an eye for a long sleep. Ah, man, man, I've had sore work. God help them all down yonder"; and he waved his whip towards Gorteen and Armoy; "sure they've sore hearts this day. It's not what we expected, Shaw," said he. "Well, no matter, it's all in the day's work. Good luck, boy." And he drove for Curleck and the white house on the hill.

Halfway up the slope to Stonegate I left the road, struck through the fields to my left, and came to the oak plantation which lay on the inward side of

Rhamus. It was quiet there and dim ; the young leaves thick above, the brushwood thick below. Cautiously I crept through the scrub of hazel and thorn and briar ; so came to the ditch and hedge which kept the plantation from the castle fields. Here and there I went, spying and listening, but though I heard the sound of voices and of shovel and spade, I saw but little, and at last I took off my cloak and climbed an oak that stood beside the ditch.

From the oak I had full view of Rhamus hill and of the castle walls. On the side next to me the slope was gradual, but on the other sides it was steep with hedges running criss-cross, like long stitches in a sampler. Right on top—chief ornament of the sampler, so to speak—lay the castle, surrounded by its own ditch and hedge, and commanding not only road, river, valley and plantation, but most of the intersecting hedges. Its position was higher than that of Emo but not so high as the crest of Bilboa beyond the river. From Emo and Bilboa it was distant about three-quarters of an English mile, from the plantation not more than two furlongs. Against guns it could not stand an hour ; but I saw well that bullets might avail as much against it as hailstones. No men could live in the nearest ditches, in the fields they must go down like ninepins. But, thought I, the dark is something of a shield.

Round the plantation was a high ditch crowned with a thick whitethorn hedge that, on the castle side, ran over the hilltop and down to the Bunn road. Beyond this, at a distance of thirty feet, was a second hedge that ended abruptly near the hilltop ; the space between making a grass-covered causeway which

centuries ago had doubtless been a noble avenue. Beyond the causeway lay a rushy field, very long and about a hundred and fifty yards wide, and known locally (and heaven knows why) as the Orchard ; its further side adjoining the Paddock in which, as I judged, the Master even then was entrenching his carts, stores and cattle. This Paddock was not wider than the width of Rhamus, its depth was some thirty-five yards ; on three sides it was enclosed by a ditch and hedge—the same that the Master was strengthening—its fourth being the ruined wall and portal which bounded Rhamus on the north.

The castle itself was oblong in shape. On three sides were limestone walls from six to fourteen feet high, all monstrous thick, loop-holed and covered with ivy. On the south side, which overlooked Bilboa and Thrasna river, were two embrasures, and at each corner a round turret, also loop-holed and ivy-clad, entrance to which was from the grass-grown courtyard through narrow doorways. Of the courtyard and the Paddock I could see nothing, nor of anything within them ; for my point of vantage was not sufficiently high, and the light was bad, and between me and them was that barricade of carts, flanked by the Paddock ditch, of which Moran had spoken.

There then stood the castle, girt and defended on all sides, well situated and impregnable almost against open attack ; garrisoned, furthermore, by determined men who every hour were strengthening their defences. I could see them toiling at the great ditch which stretched across the north side, could hear their voices and the click of spade and shovel as they dug and

piled. Hark. That surely is the Master's voice? Hush. That of a certainty is Jan? Now comes a buzz of excitement; and quick upon it the crack of a rifle from the road turret, a cheer, a distant noise of skirling followed by a crackle of shots. What was happening? Was Slane attacking? Another crack from the turret was echoed by another crackle from the road; again a cheer in the courtyard was answered by distant skirling; then silence fell, and in it I guessed that Christy was diverting himself on the way back from Bunn. Yes; it was so. I heard hooves clatter up to Stonegate and go down behind me towards Emo. Ah, Christy, my man, what a Napoleonic blunderer you are. Hear him, full of insolence and whiskey, go trampling on; hear his men behind him go singing in their glory!

I left the tree, buckled on my cloak, went back through the plantation and up across the rushy fields. A drizzling rain began to fall. Cheerlessness deepened upon the land. At Stonegate I inspected Slane's guard and gave them certain instructions; then went along the Bunn road down towards the River house. I met no one. The fields lay lonely as prairies. On my left was Rhamus hill, with horses grazing upon it and the castle frowning on top. But no rifle cracked at me from the turret and nothing, except a cloud of drifting smoke, stirred near its walls.

The River house stood within rifle shot of Rhamus and not fifty paces from Thrasna bridge; a long one-storied building, white-washed, thatched, covered with rose trees and creepers and surrounded by firs and apple trees. In front were shrubs and flower beds

enclosed from road and river bank by moss-grown walls ; at the back a yard was surrounded with offices, and in these some of Clark's men were diverting themselves, playing cards in the cart-shed, tossing for half-pence and shooting marbles in the turf-house, smoking and sleeping and singing in the barn loft, boiling potatoes and making tea in the dairy. They welcomed me with a cheer, shouting, "Good man, captain," "You're the boy for them, captain"; and when I stepped into the kitchen such a greeting met me from Slane and those with him that my ears rang. I sat a while before the fire, talking and smoking, drank a bowl of tea laced with good whiskey ; then with Slane crossed the bridge and toiled up Bilboa hill. Such a dreary prospect lay before us, melancholy with rain and silence ; below the river winding sulkily, beyond grey hills crowding back to a misty mountain, over all a glowering sky.

Not to study prospects, however, had we come, but to reconnoitre Rhamus. Long and closely we viewed it, and what I saw but confirmed my opinion of how hard a task was before us. Clearer than ever was it now that the castle was only vulnerable on the plantation side and that open attack must fail. "We must try in the dark," said I, "and we must use our wits even then. Have they water, do you think, Slane?"

"I was asking that," he said. "The lads say there's a well on the outside—but sure the Lord's good to Irishmen in the way of water. If this lasts," said he shaking the rain from his hat, "they'll not be dry for a night an' a day anyhow."

"No," said I with a laugh. "That's so, Slane.

But listen to me, Michael": and in shelter of a hedge I told him what he was to do when word came to him. "Keep the men from the whiskey," said I at the end. "Keep strict watch and let no one pass the bridge without challenge. You may get word to-night, and you may not; but be always ready. And for your life obey my orders implicitly."

Back at Emo I found revels going in the yard. Christy had brought whiskey and a cart of loot from Bunn. Already most of his men were merry, and in the barn my own men had gone far on the way to glory. I was greeted with shouts and cheers, with thumps on the back and protestations of eternal friendship. "Good man, captain," was the word; or, "Leave it there, me son"; or, "Long life to ye, me hero, an' here's to us all."

I answered them nothing; just brought them to silence with my eyes, then ordered one to bring out Moran. Presently he came through the rain, unsteady he also on his feet and flushed about his foxy cheekbones, climbed up the ladder and stood before me. "This is the discipline you keep, Quartermaster," said I, "when your captain is away."

He stood silent on the barn floor, blinking at me like an owl, and around him the men stood gaping wide. "Ach, but sure," said he at last, "what harm anyway in drinkin' success to us all?"

"The success I want won't come by drinking, my man," said I. "It's men I want to lead not swine." I stamped in a fury. "Do you hear me, you idiot," I shouted and took him by the collar. "Stop your infernal blinking, or, by God, I'll scatter your bones."

That sobered Moran. "Easy, easy," begged he.

"I'm sorry, captain, I'm sorry. Tell me what I'm to do."

"Get all this poison into the house and let no man touch another drop without orders from me. Have that stuff in the cart carried in and put away. See that the men are fed, that their arms are clean and dry, and that the horses are safe. And you," said I from the doorway to the gaping revellers, "be men next time I come to you and I'll treat you like men."

They answered me never a word, but more than one looked sorry or ashamed. I went down the ladder and through the gateway across the yard.

The kitchen was empty. From the crook hung a pot of potatoes and an iron kettle. By the hearth stood a brown tea-pot on crushed coals. The table was littered with broken bread, tins of meat, pots of jam and marmalade, a side of bacon and sundry packages. On the dresser was a row of mugs and a pile of plates. I stood looking at the tea-pot, wondering in myself who had put it there. Had Susan? Had Moran? I went softly to the passage door, opened it and stood listening. The house was quiet; but soon a murmur of voices came down to me and the steady tramp, tramp of feet across a floor. Who was tramping? Was it Susan? Was it Leah? I stole up the stairs; and just as I reached the landing the bedroom door opened and Leah came out. Our eyes met. She started and shrank back. I tried to speak and could not. Quickly the door was closed and locked against me. And I was left frozen there, staring at what I had seen in Leah's eyes.

From the landing I went back to the kitchen; thence, after a while of brooding by the fire, up into

the parlour. Here it was that, on a Sabbath afternoon in April, the Master and I had talked together ; now how it was changed. Its freshness had gone, its spirit of homely comfort. It looked cold and dismal ; stank like a village tap-room. The carpet was mud-stained. In the grate was a smouldering fire, on the hearthrug a litter of paper, sticks and broken peat. On the table by the window lay a bridle and saddle, a slouched hat and a handful of cartridges. On the sideboard were bottles of stout and brandy ; on the dining-table stood tumblers, a bottle of whiskey and a porringer of water ; beyond the table, in the Master's leather chair, sat Christy Muldoon, arms hanging limp and his head on his breast. I stood filled with disgust, ready to take Christy by the scruff and fling him into the rain. But I wanted to hear his news ; so crossing I shook him awake. He grunted, snorted, lifted his bloated face and blinked at me. "Eh?" said he. "Wha'—what's the matter? Goo'—good man, Shaw." He waved an arm, smiled benignly, and sank into slumber. It was piteous. "May you never wake," said I ; with that climbed the stairs into Jan's room, flung down on the car cushions, and lay pitying myself. Till in a while I dropped asleep.

About three o'clock I woke and went downstairs. On the landing, but for the tick of the clock and the sound of someone tramping beyond the door, all was peaceful. In the kitchen Moran was frying bacon on a pan, and Dan O'Hea sat smoking by the fire with his coat drying on his knees. All was as well as could be expected down in Curleck, Dan reported ; the children doing bravely and the women quiet at last. He had gathered the Catholic dead together ;

to-night the women would wake them and to-morrow would bury them in Falloon beyond the lake. The Protestant dead were lying in Strong's house ; waiting my orders, Dan said in his whimsical way. Louth castle was holding out. The White house was full of Protestants and surrounded by the Leaguers in force. Lismahee was sacked. Enniskillen was defiant. There was word of hot work in places beyond the lake. "We're well enough at present," said Dan, "only hungry a trifle. We've shared our rations, an' we've gathered in what we could ; but sure the childer are frettin'."

I told Dan to bury the Protestants if no one came for them, and to help the women in disposing of their dead ; ordered Moran to give him what stores could be spared from the carts, wished him good luck and turned for the parlour. "You'll be eatin'?" said Moran across his shoulder. "If you can spare a mouthful, Quartermaster," I answered and walked on.

I found Christy awake, his chair drawn before the fire and himself basking there. He greeted me heartily. "Ha. Divil take me, if it isn't the captain's own self." He reached a tumbler from the mantel-shelf and gulped a mouthful. "Long life to ye, my boy, an' prosperity to Ireland. Sure I was wonderin', now, when we'd be seein' ye. Says I to Moran after I had forty winks, 'Where's himself now till I give him the news?' 'Ah, he's above, I'm thinkin',' says he, 'divertin' himself with the women.' 'Women,' says I at that, 'what women?' . . ."

A little of that went far with me. I leant towards Christy and tapped his knee with my forefinger.

"Pardon me, my man," said I, "but your news is wanted more than your insolence."

"Insolence!" Christy leant back in his chair and gaped at me. "Arrah, what insolence? Is it me, Shaw? Arrah, man alive!"

I had to forgive Christy; that day it seemed I must spend in forgiving. "Very well," said I with a sigh. "You're forgiven, Muldoon. But don't let once become twice, I ask."

"To be sure. Man, I didn't know. Why, heavenly hour, Shaw, don't ye know me yet?" I assured Christy that I knew him perfectly; and presently he ended his protestations, leant back in his chair, crossed hands over his paunch, and whilst I lunched at the table on tinned salmon, fried bacon and bread, went on telling his news. Near the door Moran sat smoking, with his chair tilted against the Master's desk. Overhead that tramp, tramp, as of a caged tigress, continued without ceasing. On the window the rain beat drearily.

Christy's general news amounted to little. Bunn he had found agog with its own little affairs, turbulent, fractious, full of diversion and rumour. No trains were running, the mails were delayed, the telegraph wires were working irregularly, and of course no newspapers had come. People said that over the North wild things had been done in the moonlight; that here the Protestants were holding the hills and there the Leaguers, that Derry had closed its gates, that Enniskillen was shouting No surrender, that Belfast was running blood, that in Dundalk and Drogheda work was not yet over. In Cavan itself had been little trouble, or in most of the counties below the line, except in those places where

the military were strongest or the Protestants most numerous. Thus the Curragh was holding out behind trenches, Athlone barracks was still occupied by the redcoats, and though a Republic had been proclaimed in Dublin city parts of it were yet in possession of the soldiers and police and refugees. In Kingstown harbour the mail packets had been captured ; but the guard-ship had sunk many of the attacking boats, fired shell at the town and steamed away. In Cork harbour also there had been trouble among the ships ; nor had Galway shaken itself free without a struggle ; but, speaking broadly, all Ireland below the line was ours, whilst all above the line must be ours in a while. "Sure, what can stop us ?" asked Christy, wrinkling his Napoleonic brow, waving his masterful hand. "Why before night there'll be more boys in Ulster than would sweep it bare, and if bullets can't beat the redcoats won't hunger lick them in a day or two. Man, Ireland's as good as ours from top to toe. Man, it's been a great night's work, so it has. We've made history, me boys. Here's to ould Ireland an' ourselves an' everybody," shouted Christy, and reached his glass from the mantel-piece and gulped again.

Moran joined in with Christy ; but my applause was not hearty. No doubt most of his news was true, was only what I had expected indeed ; still I wanted tidings not rumours. Also I had lost my delight in the rush of Christy's eloquence, in the play of his Napoleonic features. I sat watching him furtively and comparing him to a glorified jelly-fish, finding him slippery, invertebrate, and ready to sting. I sat listening to the rain plashing down, to that in-

cessant tramp, tramp, to and fro upstairs. Was it Susan? Was it Leah?

Himself and Ireland being glorified, Christy passed to an account of the doings in Bunn town; and again waxed eloquent. Such excitement, such diversion. The streets were crowded, drink was flowing free, everyone was dancing with joy. The barracks had been captured without a shot; the Protestants had come out like lambs; every minute prisoners were coming in and being turned like cattle into the fair-green. "They're yonder in hundreds, crowded together on the hill, the miserablest pack ye ever seen. I wonder if they're there yet," said Christy, glancing at the window; "if they are their pelts'll get wet. I heard word of them bein' put into the church; but maybe they'll have to wait. What about them anyway?" said he; and Moran barked his agreement, and Christy went on.

Some time in the morning Micky Dooley, who was first in command, had marched to the town-hall steps and, with the bellman ringing at his elbow, had proclaimed Ireland free and a Republic. "Then the drums an' the fifes struck up, the Rahellan brass band played *God save Ireland*, an' everyone cheered till they were hoarse. After that a procession was formed an' marched about the town an' through the fair-green an' across the bridge, the women caperin' on the sidewalks an' the childer skippin' an' shoutin'. Then the drinkin' began, an' the lootin', an' the diversion. The hotel was turned inside out. Magee's shop was emptied on the street, then Black's the draper's, then the rest o' the Protestant shops, then the goods-store at the station an' the market yard. Micky and his boys,

with meself helpin' what I could, strove to keep order ; but it was like fightin' the elements, so Micky just took his share, an' I got Magee's cart an' filled it with what I could find. What else could I do? Sure it was a sin to let everything go to waste. . . . An' then spreein' began. You'd see a barrel on the side-walk with men an' women drinkin' like fishes around it, an' them carryin' it away in cans an' porringers. You'd see a woman staggerin' along with a bag o' flour on her back, or a bale o' cloth in her arms. You'd see childer fightin' over a bottle o' sweets. You'd see the priest lashin' about him with a stick here, an' a ruction there, an' the boys goin' wild everywhere. Such doin's—such doin's. 'Twas wonderful to the world. 'Twas like hell broke loose. Says I, There'll be murder here before long ; so I gathers the boys together, an' takes the cart o' loot, an' starts away. . . . Now what do ye think o' that for sport, captain?" asked Christy, turning in his chair.

What could I think? "God help Ireland," answered I, "if there are many Bunn towns in it this day. Fools, fools! Is this the way to welcome freedom?"

"Ach, it'll pass," said Moran and spat on the carpet. "Sure it's only the Irish way o' rejoicin'. They'll have their burst, an' the morrow they'll settle down."

"I'm thinkin' so too," said Christy before the fire, reaching for his tumbler. "If ye unchain a dog it's bound to caper. Sure it's nature—it's nature."

"To be sure," said Moran. "Anyway, we're out of it all an' we've got our share o' the loot. Ay. Ay."

"Ay. That's so. Ye may be thankin' meself for that," said Christy swelling in his chair. "It's well I was on the spot."

"Ah, you're the boy, Christy," said Moran winking at myself. "You weren't behind the door when brains were bein' given out. Troth, weren't ye?"

"Well no, Patrick. Maybe not. I wouldn't say it meself; but sure I might be thinkin' it."

I sat listening to the rain and to that tramp of feet upstairs—up and down, tramp, tramp, unceasingly—and somehow my heart was doleful. Why was I doleful? The Cause was prospering. I had eaten and slept. I sat in comfort. Did the rain oppress me? Or was it Christy's news? Or was it that tramping upstairs, steady, insistent as the toll of a funeral bell? Who was it? Why was it? I sat forlorn in my chair, listening, listening, each footfall hammering at my brain.

But Christy and Moran talked on, comfortable they and content with pipe and glass, no burden of thought to trouble them, no care, no fear. Sufficient unto them was the empty moment going by. Last night was far away; the present was bountiful; of the future let the devil take care. Such, I have found, is the cheering philosophy of Irishmen everywhere. Yet I too was an Irishman.

In a while Moran rose and looked through the window towards Rhamus. "I wonder how they're managin' up yonder, now? Faith, if they haven't whiskey they've water enough, I'm thinkin'. *No surrender and keep your powder dry.* That's what I read once on an Orange flag. Ay." He looked at me. "Wouldn't ye be of opinion, captain, that maybe surrenderin' would come easier to them when the powder's wet?"

I sat watching the rain drops splash against the

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window. Surrender? If the Master knew everything would he surrender? "Perhaps it would, Quartermaster," answered I; "maybe it would."

"Why to be sure it would," said Napoleon from the arm-chair. "The right time to hit a man is when he's miserable. Sure there's no fight at all in a drowned dog. Now I may be a fool an' nothin' of a judge, but all the same if I had me way this is the tactics I'd follow. . . ."

I knew enough of Christy's tactics. Pretending to heed his exposition of them, I sat considering my own. If the Master knew everything would he surrender? Was I justified in attacking without giving him chance to surrender? Perhaps the rain had damped more than his powder? Perhaps he was only waiting for me to offer my terms?

I rose in a while, crossed to the Master's desk and opened a leather case that lay upon it. In it was writing paper, beside it stood ink-pot and pen; without considering further I spread my elbows and wrote:

Head Quarters, Armoy Commando,

Emo House. May 10th, 19—.

5 o'clock p.m.

To Edward Farmer, Esq. In Rhamus Castle.

Sir,

As captain of the Armoy commando, I have the honour to inform you:

- 1. That Ireland has this day been proclaimed a Republic.*
- 2. That Her troops are now in possession of the*

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country, of the deposed Government and of all its seats, officials, servants and power.

3. That the Commando of which I have the honour to be captain is now, as result of successful military operations, sole authority of the new Government in this district.

4. That all parties not willing to submit to the new Government must, after due warning given and received, be adjudged rebels to the Republic and be treated as such.

5. That the policy of the new Government, and of myself its servant, makes for leniency and peace rather than for severity and bloodshed.

In these circumstances, it is my duty and pleasure to offer you terms of honourable surrender in submission to my Government; and to inform you that, if within twenty-four hours from the date of this message, you have not so surrendered and submitted, you and all with you must be dealt with as rebels to the Republic. May I add that, in the event of your submission, I pledge my word as an officer to protect you and yours from molestation.

I have the honour to be, sir,

Yours obediently,

James Shaw,

Officer commanding the Armoy Commando.

That done I enclosed it in an envelope, carried it to the window and sitting there considered the best way of sending it to Rhamus.

"Been scribblin', I see," said Moran wagging his pow at the letter. I nodded back.

"A love-letter no doubt," laughed Christy in the

chair, his tactics expounded and done. "Well, you'll get no post to carry it the day, Shaw, an' maybe none to-morrow ; but sure if herself's anywhere convenient, I'm thinkin' one o' the boys for a consideration'd risk his skin——"

I rose at that. "Come, boys," said I ; so led the way through the kitchen and out to the barn.

There all the men were gathered out of the rain, some sleeping, the rest in groups on the floor playing cards. At sight of me the players rose hurriedly and stood in silence. "Lads," I said, "I want a volunteer to carry an important despatch under flag of truce to Rhamus castle. There will be no danger I think ; but the man I want must not think of danger. Who offers ?"

At once Moran stepped forward and with him my trusty militia-man, Sergeant M'Aloon, his shoulders squared and his wounded arm in a sling. Two or three others, Christy among them, followed their example ; the rest stood hesitant. "Can't spare you, Quartermaster," I said ; "nor you, Adjutant. Are you sure you're fit to go, James ?" I asked of M'Aloon.

"Certain sure, captain," answered James, standing stiff as a ramrod, his ugly face not more expressive than a turnip.

"Then I'll send you, James. Make through the fields up from Bunn road, and go boldly. When challenged halt and shout, 'A message under flag of truce' ; after that use your own wits, but bring an answer if you can." I put the letter in his pocket, tied my handkerchief on a flailstaff and gave it to him. "Good luck, James," said I. The men gave him

a cheer. He saluted, buttoned his coat, stiffened his back, and went down the ladder.

I watched James go across the lawn and out upon the road ; then sat down among the men and watched them at the cards. Christy joined in and Moran ; I was offered a hand but refused. In my mind I followed James along the road, past Stonegate, and on towards the bridge. Now he was going up through the fields ; now he was being challenged ; now . . .

No. There came no sound of a shot. Of course not. The Master was no bandit.

The minutes went slowly. I grew restless ; presently went down the ladder and fell to pacing the gravelled avenue from house to gate and back again. Why did James not come ? Had they kept him prisoner ? Had they—— ? Look. There he came, trudging steadily with the flag under his arm. I hurried to meet him. " Well, James ? " I said.

He stopped, clicked heels and saluted, drew a paper from his pocket and handed it to me. Eagerly I unfolded it and found it was my own letter come back to me. In the top corner, written in pencil, was, "*Seen. Edward Farmer.*" At the bottom, also in pencil, was, "*The honest cash is waiting, Jamie. Come and take it, Jamie. God save the King. Jan Farmer.*"

So. This was their answer. I stood looking at my letter, the words blurred and among them the figure of Jan as he had stood before me on this very road one Sabbath evening some four weeks ago. " Take your rebel's hand off my coat," he had said. " You'll pay," I had answered. " By God, you'll pay." " It'll be honest cash when I do," Jan had said ; now, " Come and take it, Jamie," he wrote.

A blot of rain splashed from my hat upon the letter. I looked across the grey fields towards Rhamus. "I'm coming, Jan," thought I; so turned and with M'Aloon went back between the hedges. From Bunn the rain came pelting viciously. The hills crouched shivering in the ring of a pitiless sky. Drear and seeming hopeless lay our little corner of this triumphing Ireland; yet through it I splashed cheerfully, dole gone from my heart. The Master was defiant. Jan was ready to pay. I was not unwilling.

"And how did you get on, James?" I asked in a minute.

"Aw, the best," said the Sergeant in his blunt dry way, bullet-head rigid and eyes straight to his front. "Sure I had no trouble. About fifty yards from the castle Jan challenged me through a loophole. 'Stand,' he shouts. 'Who the divil are you? An' what in blazes do ye want?' 'A message under flag o' truce,' answers I. 'Then bring your danged message an' your rag,' says he; so up I walks to the turret, an' he puts out his hand an' takes the letter, an' says he, 'Right about turn, me snub-nosed hero, an' move if ye dare.' Well, I turned me back, an' waited there like a duck in a storm, an' in a while I hears Jan shoutin' again. 'Right about turn, me one-armed Republican,' says Jan; an' I turns an' takes the paper from him, an' says he, 'That's for Shaw the——'"

M'Aloon stopped, twisted his head a little and looked at me across his shoulder.

"Go on, James," said I. "Don't spare me."

"That's for Black Shaw, the pig-drover," says Jan. "Tell him we're short of note-paper," says he; 'an' for

yourself, darlin' man, be at the road below inside three minutes or I'll tickle your hindquarters with a bullet.' 'I'm obliged, Mr Farmer,' answers I, 'an' I hope we'll be meetin' again, sir, some day.' 'Ye'll be meetin' your friends in hell fire, Pat's James,' he shouts, 'if so be you an' your arm in a sling aren't out o' Rhamus townland inside three minutes.' 'Then, good evenin', sir,' says I; with that touches me hat an' turns an' starts down the hill——"

"But not running, James, I hope?"

"Aw, divil the run; but just as if I was followin' a hearse. An' divil a bullet tickled me at all. An' when I got to the gate I just stopped at it to light me pipe before steppin' into the road. An' divil a bullet came ticklin' me at all."

"Good man. You did well, James boy. And you saw nothing but the walls, I suppose?"

"Just them, an' the muzzle o' Jan's ould snider, an' his own monkey's face in the loophole, an' the ivy, an' the smoke, an' that's all."

"And you heard nothing, James?"

"Och, I heard Jan, an' I heard cattle bellockin' somewhere, an' I heard the kind o' murmur you'd hear when ye were passin' a school, an' once I heard the Master's big laugh, an' after it. I heard Jan laughin' . . ."

Like that James babbled on in his quaint Irish way till we came to the barn; but I no more than heard him. Did they laugh, then? Was I a pig-drover, then? Oh, by the Lord, I'd turn their laugh. Up the ladder I went. "Lads," said I, "drop your cards and get ready. I'll want you in a while, my sons."

The men rose, somewhat reluctantly it may be, for

Hillsiders will play cards on a coffin lid. "Right, captain," answered they. "You're goin' to bang them?" whispered Moran, his face gleaming up in the gloom. I nodded. "Good man," said he, and crooked an arm and cut a caper on the floor. "Hurroo, me boys. Now then, men. Away with them prayer-books, an' fill your bellies, an' get ready for work. Dang your good hand, Phil Cafferty; stick it in your britches an' play it when I'm done with ye. Wake up there, me buckos. Come, rise before I take me fut to your ribs. Up—up—up . . ."

I left the Quartermaster to his dragooning, crossed to the house, shut myself in the parlour, and sat down in the Master's chair. The room was full of a gloomy dusk, the house heavy with silence. I could hear the rain drops flick against the windows, the wind keening in the eaves. Overhead the sound of tramping had ceased and all was quiet there. The silence weighed upon me, and (strange mortal that I was) now that they had quieted I missed those prowling feet.

Strange to be sitting there in the Master's chair, in his own parlour, with himself and Jan out in the rain, with Leah and Susan caged upstairs. What did Jan and Leah know or think? Ah, thought with both of them must be bitter at that minute; their thought of Red Shaw be bitterest of all. What is he doing to my Leah? thought Jan. What has he done to my Jan? thought Leah. And there sat I having both in the hollow of my hand—both—both. Ah, but I longed to see Jan writhing in my grip, to squeeze payment from him drop by drop: ah, but I burned to see Leah stricken in my hand.

Stricken? Did I wish that? No. I longed to

do her service. I wanted her but to smile upon me, to ask some little favour. . . .

Tut. I was dreaming. Never would Leah smile upon me again, or ask any favour. I remembered her words, saw her scorning me on the hearthstone, shrinking back in horror through the doorway. "Fool, fool," said I to myself and sat spreading helpless hands before the fire. "Let her go," said I; and my other self answered, "Wait awhile. She is safer here. She is near you here."

Why were they so quiet? Why had that tramping ceased? Maybe they had gone! I rose, opened the door, and for the third time that day went creeping up the stairs. Only the clock stirred on the landing and the rain against the windows. I stole to the door and listened. No sound came to me. I knocked: then louder: then louder still, calling "Mrs Hynes—Mrs Hynes—I want to speak to you."

And with that the other door opened behind me, and turning I saw Susan step out and come along the landing.

She had washed her face and tidied her hair; looked less forlorn, I thought, and weary. Slowly she came through the dusk, stopped and stood resting a hand on the balustrade.

"Good evening, Mrs Hynes," I said. "I've just come up to see that all was well with you. You're comfortable, I hope?"

She dropped her eyes and sighed heavily, disappointed I knew with my empty speech. "Ah, yes," she said. "We're comfortable."

"That's right. And you've had what food you want, I hope?"

"Ah, yes," sighed Susan. "We've had enough; ah, plenty."

"Good," said I. "And you're both well?"

"Ah, we are," sighed Susan. "Sure we are."

"I heard someone pacing up and down this afternoon, and it made me uneasy. I thought perhaps something was wrong."

Then Susan looked up, took a quick step and clutched my arm. "'Twas her," she whispered, with a backward glance along the landing. "I thought she'd go mad. Up an' down—up an' down—till me brain turned. 'Dead,' she kept mutterin', 'both dead. Out in the cruel rain—dead—dead.' Ah, my God, but 'twas sore to hear an' see her. An' then she'd call Jan's name, over an' over an' over. An' still she'd keep goin' up an' down—up an' down. An' never a tear or a sob, an' always that mad look in her eyes an' that strange look on her face. Ah, God help us both. Sure it's cruel hard. . . . But maybe ye know somethin'?" said Susan, her hands tight on my arm, her eyes eager on my face. "Tell me if ye do. Ah, for God's sake, tell me if ye do."

I stood looking down upon Susan's old piteous face, its lips trembling, its eyes questioning passionately, and my heart ached; not for her only, but for all the women in Ireland whose faces were stricken that day. Ireland was free; yes, but at what a cost of mortal agony. What of the dead, what of us who had worked? The dead were dead, we had but worked our own will: and now, as ever in the world, women were weeping over our work. I laid my hand on Susan's shoulders and answered her one question first. "We've not found him yet," I said; "but I'll

keep my promise to you, Mrs Hynes. John's alive, I do believe, and to-morrow I'll try to find him. Does that comfort you anything?"

She stood looking at the floor and shaking under my hands. "Ah, it does," she moaned. "Ah, John, me man—John—John!"

"As for your daughter, Mrs Hynes," I continued, hurriedly, like one doing good by stealth. "You may tell her from me that Jan Farmer is alive and well and still my very good enemy. And say if you like that my treatment of him may depend something on her treatment of me. She'll understand."

I turned with that, but Susan clung to my arm. "An' you'll search in the mornin'?" she said.

"Yes, I'll search in the morning. Don't worry yourself, ma'am. And don't be frightened in the night," added I from the stairs, "if you hear the rifles. You'll be quite safe. Good evening to you."

She did not answer; but I had not reached the hall when I heard her hands fall heavily, and heard her sigh and moan: "Rifles in the night? Ah, God above, is this never to end!"

I stood in the hall till sound of the door closing came to me; then went to the room that lay below that other room and flung myself on a sofa there. Presently I heard a murmur of voices; but though I waited long I heard no sound of prowling feet.

Jan was alive and well, you see.

CHAPTER IX

RIFLES AND HURDLES

BETWEEN eleven and twelve o'clock that night we moved out from Emo and the River house to attack Rhamus castle. Before starting each man had served to him a good ration of bread and meat, a naggin of whiskey, and forty rounds of ammunition ; nor did any go into the dark ignorant of what was before him. In the plan of attack every man had his appointed place and duty, every leader his post and work assigned ; and so perfect was our mutual understanding that I had but to give word or signal and it was passing from one to one of the Commando like a wind-whisper round Rhamus hill. "All together an' each for himself," was Moran's way of describing our scheme of operations ; "every man goin' on his own stomach straight up, but with one eye on his neighbour this side, an' t'other on his neighbour that side, an' every eye in him burstin' to be in at the death."

That exposition is maybe more humorous than lucid, but it will serve. The boys understood it ; Christy our tactician applauded it ; I cared nothing so long as the boys knew their duty and did it. "For pity's sake, lads," said I, "keep one of your eyes open for me. Lie tight till you get the word ; go steady when you get it ; hit like murder when the

order comes ; but if you value whole skins keep that one eye for your captain." They made the barn rafters crack with a ringing cheer ; then one by one stole out down the ladder and across the fields to their appointed places in the circle round Rhamus. I left Sergeant M'Aloon with Dr Sheehan and five men in charge of Emo. At Stonegate and the Crockan head and the River house were strong guards. From Curleck O'Hea had brought up all his men for the attack. In all we mustered three hundred and nineteen rifles ; the rest of the Com-mando were on duty, or lay wounded in Armoy, or were dead.

The night favoured us. Since nine o'clock no rain had fallen, but the sky was threatening and in it no sign of the risen moon. The darkness was dense enough to cover us yet light enough to peer through ; was what Christy called "betwixt and between" and what Moran described as "washed out by the rain." A cold wind blew over Rhamus from the south-west. Beneath our feet the fields sagged and sucked like mud-soaked sponges. In the world, beneath that frowning sky, seemed never a sound but the sough of the wind and the splash of gathering feet ; seemed never a thing that lived save those creeping shadows, going "betwixt and between" to their places round the hill. "Lord, Lord, but it's the dismal night," moaned Christy as we footed through the whins. "Ach, sure it's full o' shiverin', so it is." "Never heed, Christy boy," whispered Moran, "you'll be warm enough in a while. Wait till Teddy Farmer let's loose the blue blazes at us, my son. Wait till a bullet comes whistlin' *The Protestant Boys* in your lug.

Warm? Aw, by the livin' piper, you'll be that warm in twenty minutes, Christy, that it's coolin' yourself you'll be in the bottom of a ditch." "Ach, but whisht wi' ye, Patrick," chattered Christy, the poor and desolate man; "sure you're only—only killin' the courage in me." "Am I then, Christopher? Sure now it's the baste I am. Never heed, then; but come away till we bang them." And crouching in his washed-out darkness, knees bent and head pushed forward, like some malign prowler of the night, Moran splashed on to his banging, eager as a child in sight of butterflies. But Christy the desolate trod joylessly his way to glory, floundering, grumbling, swearing, his brow smoking and paunch a-flutter, his courage squelching in his boots. "Ach, by the Lord, such an experience," groaned he. "Mud to the knees an' glaur to the eyes——" "And fear to your rotten heart," thought I going silent at his elbow.

By midnight all were in their places; the cocks had not ceased crowing by Stonegate when, at my whispered signal, the big circle of rifles began creeping in: from the Bunn road and Thrasna river and Stonegate and Emo valley began closing up and in round the castle on Rhamus hill. Slowly we went and laboriously, crawling on hand and knee, or wriggling through the rushes, or crouching among the whins; and the stir we made would not have driven a hare from its form. At times we halted for a minute's rest, at times passed round a cheering word. Christy crawled beside me in across from Stonegate. O'Hea led up from Emo valley. Slane was tightening the net on the Bilboa side. In the Causeway by the plantation Moran and fifty picked men lay waiting.

Gradually, foot by foot, the circle narrowed. In twenty minutes we were half way there, the men in touch and cover getting scant; in half an hour we were close together as floats on a net, with Rhamus castle in our midst, set gloomy and stern on its hilltop beneath a gloomier sky. No light shone in it. Not a sound came from it. "Have they gone, d'ye think?" whispered Christy from the rushes, the wish father to his craven thought. "Eh? D'ye think it, Shaw?" And to save me from answering a rifle flashed and rang on the castle wall.

Only a single shot was fired and why it was fired I know not; but to me it came as a message from the Master that he had discovered us, and as a sign to the pig-drover that he was ready. Well, so was the pig-drover and his pigs. Rising from the rushes I blew twice on my whistle; and in went the circle with a gathering rush. Ten yards—twenty—thirty we went, and still Rhamus stood silent on its hilltop. I could see the looming walls, could see the great trench raised before the carts, could see . . .

Ah, my God, could see of a sudden fifty flashes stab into the darkness, whilst through us the bullets went whistling their infernal jig of death. Close by a man took one in the throat, whirled about with extended arms and pitched among the rushes. On my left another man got his sting in the forehead, and he collapsed into himself like an empty sack. A buzz at Christy's ear made him jump, twist round, and sink in jabbering panic on his knees. "By the holy sailor," I heard a voice exclaim behind me, "this is worse nor goin' slap wi' a scythe into a wild bees' nest. Be dam, but it is."

All this I saw and heard whilst yet the bullets were jiggling into Emo valley ; before the smoke had cleared from Rhamus I had the men on their faces in the rushes or crouched under cover of ditch and whin. I knew now the Master's strength. Our loss was only trifling. And the game had just begun.

For maybe half an hour we lay on the hill-side and girt Rhamus with a crackling ring of fire. Sometimes a flash answered us from the walls ; sometimes we skirled, rushed, fell and drew a dribbling volley ; sometimes we concentrated our fire on the south side, or on the trench and carts, and twice we feinted attacks that died out in feigned defeats. And always, outside the ring, Moran and his fifty kept creeping nearer from the Causeway towards the big trench on the north. There was the weak spot in Rhamus ; there the game would end. Did the Master know where he was weakest ? Could I get under his guard there and strike ?

Of a sudden O'Hea and I developed a fierce attack on the trench from front and flank, I firing whilst he rushed, he rushing whilst I covered, both going so determinedly as to convince the Master that at last the great blow was coming. Nearer we got and nearer, creeping, rushing, firing, creeping again ; now we could see the carts by rifle flash ; now could see the faces along the trench-top ; now could hear children screaming, and women shrilling, and the big voice of the Master shouting, " Steady there. Steady, boys " ; now could hear . . .

Ah, good man, Slane ; you're to the minute, my son. Listen to the whillaloo of his attack, there on the south side against turret and wall. He has

ladders to scale the wall, hurdles and gates to fling against the turrets. Hear the skirls, the yells, the crackle and din. The hill-side is ablaze. Turret and wall are belching fire. Ah, now the Master is meeting the great blow. Now he knows why Shaw the pig-drover tried so hard against the trench. 'Twas only to let in Slane. . . .

Was it, by God! Wait just another minute, my Teddy Farmer. See, here comes Moran with his chosen fifty. See, here steps Red Shaw to his place among them. And now, whilst your turrets are belching and Slane is storming and all that south hill-side is ablaze, let us strike just once at your mounded trench.

"Ready, Moran?" I whispered.

"Burstin'," answered the fox.

"Then bang them."

Slane was still storming the turret side, O'Hea was still feigning defeat below the trench, when Moran and his fifty rose from the rushes and came with me to end the game. In open order and crouching low, with rifles at the trail, we went; slowly at first, then quicker across an open space, then stealthily the while our flanks closed inwards; at last, about half way across the Orchard, flung ourselves panting on the grass. We had now not a hundred yards to go. Clear before us lay the trench with its background of carts and flash-lit walls. Were they waiting for us there? Could Slane hold on another minute? Could he continue to threaten that south side whilst we banged the north? "Whisper," said Moran and wriggled toward me on hip and elbow; "take a fool's advice an' get this over. Wet

grass is bad medicine for courage. An' look at the sky, Shaw. Why, man, it'll be moonlight in ten minutes." He got on hands and knees. "Is it at them?" said the fox.

"It's at them," answered I.

Still in open order and still crouching, we started up the Orchard straight and speedy on that last hundred yards. Only a little way it was; yet miles could not measure it. My heart was riotous; my eyes strained at that flash-lit trench. I heard the men pant behind me. I heard Moran mumbling to himself, "We're nearer—we're nearer—steady, me sons—steady!" Through the cart-wheels and shafts I could see figures huddling in the gloom or crouching by the walls. But by the trench no one stirred: and now we were just upon it. "Have we got them?" I said to myself. "My God, have we got them?" Another sixty yards—another fifty—another forty. Oh, surely we had them now! "Bang them, lads," I shouted. And with that the fifty rose and skirled and rushed like bulls. . . .

Whilst from carts and trench the Protestant rifles blazed red death.

You have seen fishing boats struck by sudden tempest; even so were we struck and staggered by that flashing storm. It was as if the hill-side had yawned and given us sudden glimpse of an inferno. Some of the men went down like rushes at the scythe point, a few dead, a few wounded, some in sheer helplessness of panic; but the rest charged on with Moran and me straight at the trench. Before us the rifles crackled among the wheels. "At them," cried Moran; "to hell wi' them." "Aw, holy Mother,"

went a voice in my ear ; " holy Mother ; holy Mother." I felt filled with a giant's strength, a mad glory and lust. " Oh now, my lads," I shouted : and charged like a bull.

We reached the trench. We leaped at its top. " To hell with the black Protestants," raved we and tore madly at the sheltering trench.

But in front of the trench was a pit and in it pointed stakes set cunningly. And in the trench were stakes sloping outwards, and on it rows of barbed wire, and behind it another pit digged treacherously. Also, beyond the pit were carts ranged in rows with their shafts pointed upwards, were stones and mounds and white-thorn clumps and ivied walls ; and everywhere, among the carts, behind stone and mound, on wall and turret, were the lurking Protestants each picking his man and aiming low.

We tried our best ; but our best was only madness. A few scrambled over the pit and up the trench, and were shot like rabbits in the wire. At a corner five men got over and in ; and stayed there. Round Moran a little party knelt and fired at random. Back across the Orchard men went running in twos and threes, jouking like thieves. Here and there lay the dead and dying. Of the fifty not thirty stood by me. " Aren't ye comin' over to see us, Jamie ? " called Jan's mocking voice ; " or must I pay ye there, Jamie ? " For answer I emptied my revolver at the voice ; then went to Moran and pulled him to his feet. " Come away, Moran," I said. " Man, you're only wasting powder."

" Ah, but no," said the fox. " Wait—wait. We'll beat them yet."

" Come away, I tell you. It's only murder."

" Ah, but one more shot—just one. Wait," pleaded

the fox, as a lover might plead with his mistress ; " ah, wait a minute."

The bullets were jiggling around us. The sky was clearing fast. In another minute where might the fox and I be waiting? " Damn your minute," I shouted. " Damn you, can't you see we're beaten. Get the men back, for God's sake. Come, my lads. Enough now—enough now."

So picking up our wounded and a few of our dead, we went back across the Orchard and down through the rushes to the plantation ; and all the way the Protestants fired on us and jeered us sore. Already O'Hea had called off his men, and Slane was retreating on the river side. Our losses were heavy. We were demoralised and broken. To try further would only be to fail again. " Ah, but, Shaw," pleaded Moran ; " man alive, sure we'd only just begun. Hit them again, man ; hit them again. Give me fifty men to meself, then, an' let me try once more."

But I knew better than the Quartermaster. " Patrick," said I with a hand on his shoulder ; " you're a good kind, but if you were wiser you'd know when you were beaten and you'd know when to be thankful for a whole skin. We've just got to get home now and try to forget this business and mend ourselves for another night." I pointed at the men where they stood huddled in the Causeway, or sprawling on their faces, or sitting with up-gathered knees in the moonlight among the rushes. " Look at them, Patrick," said I. " Do you think they want to try again? Ah, man, take them home—take them home!

And may God forgive me if I've blundered this night."

To Slane I sent word to call off his men and, by way of keeping the Master in his place, to set double guards at the bridge and at Stonegate. In Thady's cottage, by the Crockan on Thrasna river, and for a like reason, I made O'Hea put a picket, and another in Hogan's house on the Bunn road, and a third on the river bank between Emo and the bridge house. I had search made for dead and wounded upon the hill—everywhere but in the Paddock—had them laid on Slane's hurdles and carried back to the barn in Emo.

There Dr Sheehan was waiting in his shirt-sleeves, pipe in mouth and hat on his crown; there M'Aloon stood on guard by the kitchen door, heels together and back as stiff as a ramrod; there Christopher Muldoon sat nursing his craven heart before the kitchen fire. "More work," said the doctor in the barn; "well, it's all in a good cause." "Hot work, captain," said M'Aloon in the doorway. "Good rest to ye, sir." "Ah, an' it's yourself, Shaw," said Muldoon by the fire, twisting in his chair and turning a piteous eye. "Ah, man, the pains I have; the odious pains. I'm wounded, Shaw; ach, I'm wounded. Sheehan says it's only a colic; but, man, I know better. . . .

I went up to the parlour and locked myself in there. Moonlight was streaming through the window. In the house was peace; outside on the lawn was peace; beyond on Rhamus hill, there above the black plantation and the misty valley, was peace also.

Peace on Rhamus hill? God, what a world it was; what a strange, ironic, heartless world! You killed a man

and violets sprouted in his blood. You worked havoc on the hill-side and calmly rose the moon making heaven of your hell. Peace on Rhamus hill ; moonshine on the trampled fields and the quiet dead : but in the hearts of men only blackness of hatred and shame.

I pulled down the blind, sank into the Master's chair, and with arms on the table and my face buried in them sat brooding . . . till sleep came with the dawn.

I woke early. In the kitchen Christy was asleep on the table, and Moran lay stretched on sacks by the wall. Outside the door O'Hea sat nodding in the sunshine ; in the barn, flat on his face, with his forehead resting on his arms, Dr Sheehan lay along the threshold ; in the yard, strewn everywhere, on hay in the sheds, on sacks in the granary, in turf-house and stable and byre, the men slept peacefully. Only the wounded on the straw were awake, and the birds in the hedges.

I sat thinking a while on a sunny bank in the haggard ; then woke Moran and O'Hea and, with a squad carrying hurdles, went over Emo valley (so peaceful and fresh it was that May morning), up past the plantation, and under flag of truce came to the Orchard before Rhamus. A Protestant on duty by the trench challenged us, and I answered that we had come to search for dead and wounded. He disappeared among the carts ; came back and told us to search away.

In the Orchard and in the fields round Rhamus we found six dead ; but I knew that thirteen were missing, including the five that had rushed the trench ; so carrying the white flag I went half way across the Orchard and asked to speak with the Master. "Ye

can't," answered the Protestant, "he's at his breakfast." Then could I see Mr Jan. "Ye can't," shouted the Protestant, "he's restin' himself." And with that the Master came through the carts in the Paddock and over a plank that stretched from trench to Orchard.

Slowly, head bent, shoulders drooping, and hands under his coat-tails, he came over the grass; stopped before me and looked up. "Good-morning," he said with a nod, his face mighty grave, his grey eyes keen upon me. "You have something to say, I believe?"

"Good-morning," I answered. "Yes, I've something to say." And briefly I told my business.

"I know." He looked round the fields. "Yes, we've got your missing. Two are dead, three are prisoners, two we found wounded out here a while ago and carried them in." He eyed me in his calm way. "You'd like to have them, I suppose?"

"We would, Mr Farmer. But it's for you to say. The prisoners of course are yours; but we'd like to bury our dead."

"I know." He stood looking across at Emo. "Oh, we don't want them," he said in a minute. "You can bury your dead and you can take the rest." He turned to the trench. "James," he called, "ask Mr Jan to send them out."

I thanked him, and after that nothing was said for a while. Before me he stood in the sunlight, big, strong, calm, the lines deep on his forehead, his face very stern, his eyes very grave and sad as they roved here and there about the fields; before him I stood hesitant, wanting to speak yet with nothing to say, admiring him, fearing him, my eyes now on his face and now on the plank over which Jan was bringing

out my missing. At last he looked at me. "You've a good many dead to bury?" he said.

It was my turn to look away. "Oh, yes—a good many. It's the chance of war. You—you were too much for me this morning," I blurted. "I tried hard; but you were too much."

"Was I?" He smiled a little; turned and looked at Jan bringing out the missing; turned again to me. "Man," he said, "you soon forgot what you learnt in South Africa."

"Yes. Perhaps I did." I stood looking at my boots. "But how was I to know?" said I. "How was I to know that you'd be so ready for me?"

"That's not for me to tell," came back. "'Twas your own choice to fight in the dark." He came a step nearer. "Shaw," said he, "you'll have much to answer for at judgment day. Wasn't there blood enough on your hands without dipping them in the blood of your own countrymen? Wasn't the world wide enough for your devilments, that you must come playing them here at the expense of poor ignorant creatures of Irishmen?"

It was not for this that I had come to Rhamus. "Pardon me," I struck in; "but my devilments, as you call them, were played for Ireland."

"For Ireland," he scoffed. "You mean for the blackguards and fools that have betrayed her."

"I mean what I say, Mr Farmer. You forget the terms of a communication that I sent to you yesterday."

"Do I? You forget, Mr Shaw, that I answered your communication this morning." He turned and pointed at the dead that lay on the hurdles out among the rushes, at the dead and wounded by the trench,

and the prisoners standing blindfold. "Look," said the Master, "at your answer. There's your republicans, your sons of liberty and freedom. Look at what you've done for your Ireland. See what you've forced me to do with poor devils that I only pitied. Take them away," he shouted; "it sickens me to see them." He wheeled in a blaze of wrath. "And for you, may the next time I see your face be when the hangman's got you."

He turned with that; but his scorn rankled, and I stabbed at his back. "Why wait for the hangman?" called I. "Here I am, unarmed and protected only by a rag. Why not string up the pig-drover now, for all that I'm a guest in your own house at Emo?"

Ah, but that found him. He turned and glared at me, angry as a tortured bull; strode towards me a little way, and stopped. "You unwashed cur," he said. "Come, out of my sight inside five minutes or I'll— Take them away," he roared. "Quick, before you drive me to murder."

He was blazing angry. I feared him nothing; but, for sake of the men, I thought it wise not to tempt him further. So taking up our dead and wounded, we left the Master fuming in the Orchard, and Jan spraddled atop the trench, and the Protestants huddled among the carts, and started for Emo. In silence we went through the sunshine, Jan never mocking me once, the Protestants making no sound. I suppose they respected our dead.

Back in Emo we found all astir, the men getting breakfast in the yard, Dr Sheehan busy in the barn, Moran cooking in the kitchen, Christy sunning himself by the doorway. The morning was glorious, yet over

Emo was spread a cloud of gloom. No card playing now, no games in yard and haggard, no greetings or songs or jests. In groups the men stood eyeing us come in, a few crossing themselves, a few muttering a word of sorrow; all depressed and sullen-eyed. Even Sheehan, the kindly man, looked grave. Even Christy, at sight of the hurdles, felt a shiver in his sunshine. Even I, Red Shaw of this broken Commando, walked somewhat heavily, weighed with the burden of my sins. Yet, burden and all, did I strive to keep a cheery face. "Patience, Shaw," whispered I to myself. "Time will work wonders. Before sunset these Leaguers of yours will be playing cards on the coffin lids and you be dreaming again of victory."

We breakfasted in the parlour on dry bread, fried bacon, and tea served in mugs. The table had no cloth, knives and forks were scarce, the plates could have been cleaner, the food more appetising, the room sweeter; but we were hungry and upon our doleful selves the sunshine fell graciously through the open window. I sat in the Master's leather chair at the head of the board. Facing me was Sheehan, shirt-sleeves rolled to his elbows and pipe reeking beside his plate. On my right with his back to the fireplace, Christy filled himself like a hog at trough; on my left, unwashed, unshaven, hat on knee, waistcoat open, chair pushed far from the table, Moran emptied plate and mug with amazing quickness. I pitied myself at times; but Sheehan sat twinkling in full sunshine.

Work over we pushed back our chairs, lit our pipes and, the better to kill dull care, resolved ourselves into an informal council of war. Sheehan said nothing, I

said little, but Moran and Christy buzzed away. They grew warm, hot, excited ; soon hands were flashing, Christy was pounding the table and Moran barking his sweetest. To hear them, one might have thought that the barn held only sacks of corn, and that only dew had wet the rushes on Rhamus hill. Nor, had you seen him, so blatant, so unctuous, would you have dreamt that Christy was the man who had blundered in Gorteen and slunk home that morning across Emo valley.

"I tell ye," shouted he across the table, nor so much as glanced at poor Shaw his captain, "we never had a chance against them—not one. We struck in the dark and we struck too soon. We imagined that Teddy had only a handful o' men to help him, an divil a weapon but a fowlin' piece or two, an' divil a charge for them but powder an' shot. 'Twas the same ould mistake, the same ould blunder that Buller made at Colenso. We undervalued the enemy."

"Arrah, whisht," snarled Moran, with a snap of his yellow fangs. "Man, ye make me sick. How in glory could we know? Would ye have us go up an' ask them kindly to tell us about themselves an' what they were goin' to do?"

"Naw," answered Christy, then pursed and smacked his lips, wrinkled his wise brow, stroked his fat jowl, and continued. "Naw I wouldn't, Patrick. That's the kind o' warfare that childer play at school. But if ye weren't so ignorant, Patrick, me son, you'd have heard before this that your general that knows his business—no disrespect, Shaw," said Christy, waving a fat hand at poor myself, "none in the world, for ye did your level best—your general who knows his business, I was sayin', Patrick, has ways of findin' out the arts

an' manœuvres of the enemy. His own genius tells him somethin'. Spies an' scouts tell him a good deal . . ."

"Ah, spies an' scouts, be danged," snarled Moran, his little eyes snapping, his red whiskers bristling. "How in glory are your spies to get through stone walls? What in blazes could scouts do in the dark with bullets rattlin' every way like hailstones?"

"What's been done, Patrick, can be done again. Good spies can go anywhere. No battle in me knowledge was ever won without good scoutin'. Scouts, I've heard say, are the eyes of an army . . ."

"Chut!" shouted Moran. "Only cats, I've heard say, have eyes in the dark. Man, ye curdle me blood. . . . Then why didn't ye go spyin' an' scoutin' yourself?" shouted Moran against Christy's protests. "Why didn't ye say your say last night instead of playin' twenty-five in the barn?"

"Just because I knew me business, Patrick, an' me place. If so be the captain here had come to me last night, an' had took me by the arm, an' had said, 'Christy, me boy, ye know a trifle about tactics. Tell me now what's your opinion of this scheme o' mine'; d'ye think I wouldn't have emptied meself at the word? H'm. Well, indeed I would. Come, Shaw, you'll acknowledge that yourself."

I had mastered my desire to kick Christy from the parlour; like Sheehan I sat hearing him in patient good-humour, ready now for any happening. "Certainly I acknowledge it," said I. "Never at word of mine have you failed to empty yourself."

"To be sure," spoke Christopher, with a greasy leer. "I may be a fool, but I'm generous wi' me foolishness."

I wouldn't say at all," said Christy, raising a hand, "that me advice would have been the best, but sure 'twouldn't have been the worst. . . ."

Moran hit the table a bang that made the crockery jump. "Dang your sayin'," he shouted. "What's the good now of wastin' time on bygones. Talkin' won't alter what's happened. Here's the point"; and the crockery leaped again; "what are we goin' to do now? *Now*, Christopher Muldoon?"

Christy sat back in his chair, wrinkled his brow and through a cloud of tobacco smoke looked sapiently at the ceiling. "Well," said he, "I'll admit, Patrick, that there's sense in your question. But who am I to answer it? What am I but a poor ignorant farmer with no more sense or knowledge in me nor a spade-shaft? But maybe if ye asked the captain here," said Christy with a smirk, "he'd tell ye his mind."

But I only shook my head. "Like your spade-shaft I know nothing, Adjutant," said I; "the word's with you."

"Then yourself, doctor?" questioned Christy with his eyes on Sheehan.

"Oh, by the Lord, I'm as ignorant as yourself, Muldoon," answered Sheehan with a laugh. "My trade only begins where yours ends. All the tactics I know were learnt in the hospital."

"To be sure. Then what about yourself, Patrick," and Christy's eyes slid round upon Moran. "What's your own answer, now, to your own question, me son?"

"It's short an' it's straight," barked the fox. "I say bang them again, an' bang them quick, an' bang them till they're done. No dallyin', say I, no spyin'

an' no foolery; but at them like men till they're done."

Christy stretched his legs and settled back in his chair, grunted, considered, looked musingly at the ceiling. "Well, I've heard worse plans nor that I'll admit, Patrick, in mè time," he drawled. "In its way it's—aw, it could be worse. Wellin'ton was partial to it against the French. Boneypart at times tried it against the Rooshians an' the rest. I mind me that more than once it served its turn in the Crimea; at Inkerman, we'll say, an' the Re-dan . . ."

"Ach, be jabers, you'd drive an ass from a carrot-bed," cried Moran, pushing back his chair and pounding with his feet. "One'd think to hear ye we were gos-soons at school. What the mischief have we to do wi' Boneypart an' the Re-dan? It's Rhamus castle an' Teddy Farmer we've got to tackle, an' it's them we're here to talk about. What's your own plan, Christy Muldoon?" shouted the fox with a dive at the table. "If you've a better nor mine out wi' it—out wi' it, I say."

Christy raised a hand. "Aisy, Patrick. I was only strivin' to show ye. I said your plan wasn't so bad?"

"Then tell me a better," barked the fox, his fangs gleaming, his face all snarls. "Dang your eyes, tell me a better."

Christy smiled—the slow pitying smile of genius brooding over folly. "Patrick," he said, "you're a clever man but you're hasty. Didn't I tell ye that I knew me place? Would you have me presume me ignorance on the company without bein' asked? Not me, sir; not me. But if so be the captain there came

to me an' said, 'Christy, me boy, you've a big knowledge of tactics, an' there's hard work before us, an' I want your advice . . .'

Moran turned to me. "Ax him," he pleaded; "for heaven's sake, ax him an' have done wi' it."

But I would not ask. My pipe was out. I was weary of Christy. I had work to do. "I'm sorry, Quartermaster, but I'm afraid you'll have to ask him yourself. And for you, Adjutant," said I rising, "before I listen to any of your plans of attack I'd like to hear you upon the tactics of running away."

Slowly Christy turned in his chair, his mouth gaping, his little eyes widening, his eyebrows rising slowly into long fat creases; then deliberately he rose, thrust a hand in his waistcoat and confronted me. "Shaw," he said, "that's a hard thing to say to me."

"It is, Muldoon. I wish it wasn't true."

"It's—it's not true. I never ran away. It's a lie, Shaw. I thought I was wounded. How was I to know 'twas only a colic I had? Listen to me, Shaw. Didn't I stand by your own side on Rhamus hill an' face the bullets like a man?" Of a sudden Christy turned, stood looking a moment at the table, then dropped into his chair and buried his face in his hands. "Ah, Lord, Lord," he moaned, "that it should come to this! After all I've done, after all I've endured! Ah, Lord, Lord," moaned Christy, rolling his mighty head this way and that: and so we left him.

Out in the yard Sheehan took me by an arm and led me into the garden. "Shaw," said he in his quiet way, "I want a private word with you. I'm not inquisitive, and it's not my business to ask about your

plans, and mind you I'm not complainin' at all ; for all that, I'd like to know if you're likely to use the hurdles much more. You see I'm only mortal, and there's a bit of a practice I have out beyond that needs my attention ; d'you think yourself, now, there's likely to be more banging, as Moran calls it, soon ? ”

“ No, Sheehan, I don't. My opinion is that banging is over. Look at the men,” said I, “ and think if there's much fighting in them after this morning. There's none, Sheehan ; they're hammered, as Moran would say. I'm going to rest them and let them go home to—ah, to do the burying and get a sleep. I want only as many as will keep the cordon round Rhamus. I'll ask them to fight no more. I'm going to Bunn in a while to see if I can get guns ; and if I can't I'll starve the Protestants out. It's the only plan, the only plan. So I'd say, Sheehan, that no more work is before you. And, God knows, I'm glad.”

“ Ay. Well, faith, I'm not sorry. It's hard to see the poor lads come in. Ah, it is. And then there's the women. It's worse than we expected, Shaw,” said Sheehan with a sigh. “ Ah, it is.”

“ I'll not deny it, doctor. I can't. Still I did my best.” I stood looking at the bee-hives by the garden wall. We've both done our best, Sheehan,” I went on, “ even if we get small thanks for it. And it's all for Ireland, you know.”

“ To be sure. That's so, Shaw ; it's gospel. Ah, I'm not complainin', Shaw. No, no. All I meant to say was—” Sheehan had been talking in a dreamy way, thumbs caught in his waistcoat pockets, eyes on a plum tree that grew against the house ; now he

looked at me. "It's like this, Shaw. Some of the boys," and he nodded at the barn, "are well enough, and them I'd advise you to send to their homes; but there's five or six that'd die on the way, and they'll have to lie here for a while. Well, I can't attend to them altogether, and M'Aloon's little good with his arm in a sling—in a word they want nursing. They want a woman to tend them." He looked sideways at me. "D'you know of a woman anywhere that'd be willing? Eh?"

I stood pondering. "We could get one of their wives, I suppose. But maybe she'd be little use."

"She just would. She'd just kill them. But—" Sheehan took a step nearer. "Look here, Shaw, don't be vexed with me, like a man, but haven't you prisoners in the house there that'd help us?"

I stared at him; then burst out laughing. "So you've found me out, doctor? Who's been telling you?"

He waved a hand. "Ah, telling," said he. "Man, don't be foolish. Haven't Irishmen and doctors the gift of second sight. But no matter. What d'you think now?"

"Think?" I stood pondering a minute. Could Leah and Susan be persuaded to help the doctor? Dared I go and ask them? "But, man, they're prisoners. They scorn and hate me. Why I've brought them here heaven only knows, but—but——"

"Never heed. They're women, Shaw. I know the way of them."

"But—but they're Protestants, Sheehan, and the men are Catholics. They'd never be willing."

"Pain and death know no religion," answered the

doctor. "Women are only Protestants on the skin when trouble's about. Have I your leave to ask them?"

"You've my leave and my blessing, Sheehan," said I with a hand on his arm. "I'd rejoice to see you persuade them. But—" I shook my sapient head at the beehives. "Well, she's a determined kind."

"Then all the better nurse she'll make," said Sheehan, and added with a twinkle, "though which of them is *herself* divil a bit of me knows. Ah, leave them to me," said Sheehan, linking his arm in mine. "Man alive, doctors have big experience of women. Come away, now, till we send the best of them home, and when you get back from Bunn maybe—you'll see, Shaw; you'll see."

Well, I left it to the doctor; and somehow the leaving chased gloom from Emo. We sent the best of the wounded home and all the dead, their escort being all the men I could spare on a furlough of three days. I sent O'Hea back to Curleck, instructing him to send the women and children to their friends and to bring his men to Emo. To Moran I gave orders to combine with Slane in completing and strengthening the cordon round Rhamus; to Christy the broken-hearted assigned the duty of guarding Emo and of cheering the broken spirits of the men. "I'll try, Shaw," moaned the Adjutant. "I'll do me best with them. But sure—ah, I wish you'd never said the hard word to me."

"It's left the bones sound in you and it's left the sun shining. Cheer up, Adjutant." And I rode for Bunn town.

CHAPTER X

UNDER THE FLAG

THE day was bright and heartsome, sky deep as a summer sea, clouds like wool, the wind blowing soft ; and as slowly I rode between the hedges, past hill and meadow, stream and poplar grove, my heart was glad. After all there was hope in this pitiless world. Brooding over defeat was poor preparing for victory. The man who rose was not beaten. I had tried my best to achieve the impossible, and in failing was not disgraced. Soon my Red Leaguers would raise their battered crests ; soon I might be knocking again at the grim portal of Rhamus. A gun there on Bilboa, another beyond on Emo, a cordon drawn tight around the hill ; ah, soon the Master might regret his scorn of me. "*May next time I see your face be when the hangman's got you.*" Yes, yes. I remembered well. "I won't forget, Teddy, my boy," said I waving a hand at Rhamus as I rode for the bridge. "And I've got Leah, Jan—I've got Leah." If he only knew ; if she only knew. And to think that when I got back to Emo I might find her busy in the barn. I blessed Sheehan. I rode singing.

In Bilboa I found all keeping holiday. The fields were empty and many of the houses, but the road was alive with excited Hillsiders on cars and gigs, on

carts and afoot, all streaming in to Bunn. They sang and shouted, fiddled, sported, cheered themselves and each other, cheered Ireland and me. "Hurroo for the Armoy boys," they cried; "hurroo for Red Shaw." "Ye nailed them, captain," called one as I passed; "aw, be the Lord, ye tricked them well." "More power to ye, me son," shouted another from a cart; "you'll have Black Teddy yet." And through it all I rode on, half grateful and half ashamed.

It was the same in Bunn town. Everyone was rejoicing. The streets were crowded, seething with noise and gaiety. Green flags hung from the windows, from the market-house, floated over the barracks and the hotel. In the Diamond a band played *The Boys of Wexford*, and *God save Ireland*. Among the standings and shooting galleries, up and down on police duty went Micky Dooley's men, hats slouched, rifles on shoulders, all half drunk and swaggering. Most of the Catholic shops were open. The Protestant shops and houses stood wrecked and looted. The public houses were crowded. Men and women were drinking on the pavements; went raving and singing, with children shouting at their heels and girls and boys capering behind. In the butter-market drink was for sale on carts and stalls. A man stood on the market-house steps ranting in his shirt-sleeves of Victory and Freedom. A harridan, with her dress in tatters, and her hair about her ears, sang ribald songs inside a jeering ring. The bellman went clanging through the crowd, announcing a meeting of the citizens in the town-hall "at one o'clock sharp, with the Mayor in the chair an' the Alderman attindin' an' God save Ireland." Ragamuffins displaying green

placards and with bundles of newspapers under their arms, cried an edition of *The Republic*: "News of all the fightin'. Great slaughter in Belfast. Fall of Athlone. Siege of Derry an' Enniskillen. Here ye are. Only sixpence a copy." On a ladder someone was pulling the iron badge from the wall of the police barracks; and to the music of cheers, a postman, with the *E.R.* torn from his collar, was painting out the initials of England's King from the post office sign-board. "That's the style, Billy," shouted one from the street; "slash it out, me boy." "Begob will I," answered Billy, "an' I wish 'twas his own face."

Having stabled my horse in the hotel yard, bought a copy of *The Republic*, and taken the congratulations of many admiring citizens: "Faith an' it's the fine man ye look, captain, in your regimentals an' it's yourself now must come an' drink me health": I went into the post office to send a telegram to Dublin. Behind the counter stood the new postmaster, by name Teddy Rainey, and till that morning clerk of the market-yard; his wife with him and two daughters.

"But it's like this," Teddy was saying to Jerry Fitch, the mayor elect of Bunn, "what in glory's the use o' wastin' everythin'? There's cartloads of stuff here, orders an' stamps an' telegraft forms an' note-paper an' envelopes, an' d'ye tell me that all that's to go to blazes just because it's got the English counter-sign on it? Why, man, it'd be sinful. It'd be wastin' money. An' what am I to do till the new stuff comes? Now look here, Jerry, I leave it to your own common sense. I take this envelope here an' I strike out *On His Majesty's Service* an' above it I write *On*

Ireland's Service; well, isn't that good enough for a start? Then I take this form here an' see *E.R.* upon it; but doesn't that stand for *Erin Republic*? Or, if ye like, turn the *E* into a *I* with a stroke of your pen, an' haven't ye the equal of *Irish Republic* at wanst? Come, Jerry, isn't that common sense, I ax ye?"

Jerry, a fat clean-shaven man and by profession a publican, stood squeezing his lip between thumb and forefinger and pondering deeply. "'Tis, Teddy. I admit it. But see here now," and the mayor looked up swiftly, "who in life is goin' to alter everything? Why, it'd take days an' days."

"Ah, make your mind aisy," said Teddy with a wave of the hand; "man, can't everyone do his own alterin'? An' till the mail comes hasn't the wife an' the girls here lots of time to make a start? To be sure. Why, to be sure."

I was reluctant to come between Teddy and the postmaster, so stepping to the counter I asked Mrs Rainey if I might send a telegram on official business to Dublin. At once Teddy turned to me. "'Deed an' ye can, sir," said he, "if so be ye can manage the machine—But who's this? Is it Shaw himself? It is. Aw, be the holy, but I'm delighted to see ye. Man, I am. Leave it there now. Jerry, let me introjuce ye to captain Shaw. Here Mary, an' Maggie, an' Lizzie. . . . Glory be, but it's great to see ye. Great doin's, captain; aw, be the powers, great doin's entirely. An' sure it's yourself has done wonders beyond. Man, man, to think it's your own self. . . ."

For ten minutes Teddy, and sometimes Jerry when

he got a chance, and occasionally Mary or Maggie or Lizzie, kept the blushes mantling my cheek ; and it was only out of respect for my uniform that at last Teddy came down to business. "Aw, telegraph away, Shaw, till you're tired," said he, "but sure it's ourselves can help ye little. There's the machine, an' there's the forms, an' the wires are outside——"

"You mean that you have no operator?"

"Just that," answered Teddy. "Ye see 'twas Protestants were here before us, an' they're below on the fair-green with the rest, an——"

"But couldn't you persuade one to come and send messages? My business is most important."

"Ye might with the right end of your pistol behind his lug ; an' then mebbe the divil 'd only send your message wrong. Naw, captain, I'm fearin' you'll just have to wait your time."

It was ludicrous. I felt like one in the whirligig of a comic opera. "Then can I send a letter, Mr Rainey?"

"Aw, ye might. We're hopin' that a train'll mebbe start this evenin' for Dublin—or somewhere. If so be it does, then I'll do me endeavours to send it on. It'd be to the Government? Ay. An' would it be ready? Naw. Well, we can supply your needs, captain. There's paper an' pens, an' stamps, an' iverything, an' sure there's the parlour waitin' at your service. Naw. Well then write just where ye stand, captain ; an' the paper's sixpence, if ye please, an' the stamp'll be thrupence, an' as it's yourself sure we'll throw the pen an' ink in free."

It was more than ludicrous. I could have danced before the postmaster. But out around Rhamus, and

elsewhere in the Republic, I hoped, affairs were going seriously ; so I paid Teddy his ninepence, wrote my letter asking that two guns and ammunition might be sent to me without delay, addressed it after consultation with Teddy and Jerry to *The Secretary for War, Dublin Castle*, and left it on the counter. "You'll see that it goes," said I. "It's really very important."

"I'll do me endeavours, captain. The first chance it'll go surely. An' the answer'll reach ye post haste. Trust it to me, captain. . . . But listen, now, wouldn't yourself an' the mayor there join me over a half-one in the parlour? No. Well, no offence. Good day, captain. An' glad to see ye, an' good luck, me boy."

Did my letter ever reach Dublin Castle? you ask. It did. But how it went I know not, nor do I know what became of my ninepence. Perhaps Teddy, like an honest subject, paid it into the National treasury ; perhaps, like a wise man, he put it in his pocket. Anything was possible in those earliest days of our Republic, when Law was licence and Government chaos, when our Leaders were yet only Numbers, and even The Man Above had not found himself. But soon, it was hoped, a controlling hand would stretch out from Above and steady the land.

From the post office I went up past the butter-market and the town-hall, through the Diamond, and down Main street to the military barracks. For some time it, like so many military centres in Ireland—Glenn, for example, and historic Enniskillen, and renowned Derry—had been empty of soldiers (let England be responsible for her own folly) ; now the green flag of Ireland waved over its walls, and within them Michael Dooley and his men were

quartered. At the gate a frieze-clad sentry, not quite drunk, informed me that Michael was out on business but would soon be back, and sure if I liked I might step inside and wait. I thanked him for his kindness and stepped inside. Three or four men were shooting marbles in the square, six were playing handball in the alley, a party including a few women were fraternising over a barrel of porter in the canteen shed, along the wall a row of citizens lay asleep in the sunshine. No one heeded me. I felt oppressed. So on a form that stood by the barracks doorway I sat down, lit my pipe, and fell to reading *The Republic*.

It was a first number, badly printed and poorly edited, but full of interesting matter. A coloured cartoon showed Erin triumphant on Tara's hill, Victory's wreath on her brow and John Bull under her feet. A poem flung pæans to the world, the winds and all the stars. The leading article was headed "At Last, O my Children," opened with John Sheridan Knowles' famous invocation of freedom, and passed from rhapsody to rhapsody adown three mortal columns. "For now doth the Phœnix arise from the ashes of the centuries," went a passage; "now art thou our Country, *Erin Mavourneen, Erin go bragh*, in thy rightful place among the nations of the earth; now at last is the yoke of the Saxon flung off and the Sassenach trampled in the dust that gave him." A page in Gaelic celebrated I know not what. In bold type were congratulatory messages from half the world, some genuine, some clearly impossible in face of the fact that all had come by way of Valencia and America. No word or sign had crossed the Irish

sea. If England knew—and of course she knew—we were spared her feelings. “The tyrant is beaten,” said *The Republic* (or was it Christy?) “and knows it. There she sits cowering behind her rotten bulwarks, pale as her own chalk cliffs and as unstable . . . whilst here in the summer sea Ireland lies mistress of herself in prideful isolation.” Further on, many columns held vivid descriptions of the proclaiming of the Republic on College green, of the fervid rejoicings of Dublin’s citizens, of the election of Mayor and Officers by citizens assembled, of the Convention of Leaders, Delegates, Numbers, that had thundered in the Rotunda. Followed half a page of political news and comment; speculations on the coming Government, its form, its members, its duties; speculations on coming Ministries, Cabinets, Councils, Senates, Assemblies, Presidents, Judges. I read that the Numbers and the Man were sitting day and night in the Castle, fashioning a Constitution, organising the Army, preparing a System of defence, maturing a Scheme of taxation. It was expected that the Republic would eventually be shaped after the American model, with States, Senate, Congress and President complete; that Railways and Land, Mines and Industries, would all be Nationalised and trade established on a sound basis of Protection. For the present martial law was in force. Tolerance of all races and creeds was commended. Presently, when all danger was past and Government was established, the Protestants would be sworn to allegiance or banished the Republic. The national Religion would be Catholic, the Language Gaelic. And so on interminably.

It was tremendous. My poor brain reeled as I sat reading *The Republic* on that form in Bunn barracks square. "Leave it all to The Man Above," said I to myself; and turned to the doings of the commandoes.

Naturally I searched first for news of the Red Leaguers and found none. How indeed might I find, with such mighty doings in places greater far than Gorteen and Rhamus to be recorded, and with Mrs Rainey sitting helpless by the machine? Also I found little worth reading about the work of the Ulster commandoes, little but rumours and scraps of news telling of victory here and defeat there and bloodshed often. But what I read confirmed my belief that north of the line was yet to be trampled. Men were being hurried up to Belfast and Derry, Enniskillen and Armagh, to help the Leaguers in Tyrone and Down and Fermanagh struggling there round Protestant lairs. In Belfast terrible work was in hand. The streets were running blood. The dockyards were shambles. The city was another Paris in the throes of another Commune. Derry also within its historic walls was defiant and obstinate; nor had Enniskillen forgotten its old cry of No surrender. Still, thought *The Republic*, there was no need for alarm at the state of Ulster. It could be trampled in a week by mere force of numbers, trampled or starved or ravaged. The Republic flushed with victory was invincible. Soon the Protestants would be herded; soon on Derry walls would the green flag be flying. I read without comment; but back in my mind lurked old dreams of bloodless victories.

Of the Ireland that lay south of the line news was fuller and more satisfactory. Here not much blood had been shed. The odds had been overwhelming, the surprise almost complete. Here and there throughout the counties the Protestants had stood at bay—the police in some village barracks, the farmers on some lonely hill, a landlord in his house, a handful of soldiers in an outlying garrison—but nowhere did I read of another Rhamus or Gorteen or Curleck. The fighting in Cork harbour ended soon; the attempt on the Kingstown guard-ship had been short and sharp. Not two hundred had fallen south of the line; not a hundred Protestants remained unherded. No wonder *The Republic* flung its pæans to the stars. No wonder England stood silent and pale as her chalk cliffs beyond the Irish sea. “At last, O my Children,” said I; and there on the form sat pondering till Michael Dooley came in through the sunshine across the barracks square.

I had not seen Michael for many years; not since the days, indeed, when as a youth I had faced him in the ranks of the Gorteen awkward squad. Much had happened since then; he had aged, I had adventured, now we were captains two on the same side. He was dressed in tweeds, with leggings, brown boots, slouched hat, a riding stock in his hand, a green necktie fluttering in the wind, a gold chain hanging across his paunch. He had not shaved for three days. He looked flushed and walked unsteadily. But his eyes lighted at sight of me and his greeting was hearty.

“Ha, Shaw, it’s you,” said he giving me his hand. “Glad to see ye, sir. I’ve been thinkin’ about ye in the intervals of business all the mornin’. Yes, you’ve

been in my mind, Shaw." He spread his coat-tails and sat down on the form beside me. It was clear that age had not impaired his gift of fluency or rid him of his old pomposity. "Stirrin' work out your direction, Shaw ; yes, stirrin' work. I've been hearin' about it. Hard on the poor boys. Yes, yes. Still 'twas to be. They're martyrs to the Cause. They tell me," said Michael with a turn of the head, "that Farmer of Emo is givin' ye trouble. Is that so? Well, well. Terrible determined man is Teddy. I've had dealin's with him over horses, and I've always found him a terrible determined man. An' wise, Shaw ; ah, wise as a serpent. Still, you'll be able for him, Shaw ; you'll be able for him I have no doubt."

I thanked Michael for his sympathy and confidence. I asked him if in case of necessity he would help me with men, and he answered Yes ; asked him if he could help me to get guns, and he answered No. He thought it unlikely that my letter would reach Dublin ; thought it improbable that in any case my letter would have effect. "Dear man," said he, "think of the perturbation must be reignin' in the Metropolis. What can your application be but a drop in the surgin' ocean? Sir, our little troubles are as nothin' in the tremendous whirlpool of National affairs. Imagine a Republic in the throes of birth! Sir," said Michael spreading his fat hands upon his knees, "when I reflect upon the prodigious labours that occupy our statesmen I am thankful—profoundly thankful—that my own duties are only those of a humble officer of our Republic in this little town."

Michael's eloquence was overpowering. I sat look-

ing at his flabby jowl and portly presence, and my eyes were scornful. Still the man was amusing. His brogue was rich as butter. He reminded me of a turkey-cock gobbling in a barnyard.

"And yet, Mr Dooley," said I, "your duties cannot have been easy these last few days."

"Easy?" He turned slow eyes upon me. "Sir, what I have come through amazes even myself. This place durin' yesterday was hell. Such scenes I have not witnessed before in my long experience. Not Sodom and Gomorrah at their worst could have equalled this town. Lust and intemperance, violence and robbery, rack and ruin; had it not been for my exertions and the loyalty of my men, Bunn would have been this day a smokin' pit."

I thought of what Christy had reported of Michael's exertions in pursuit of loot, glanced at the loyal boys who even then were fraternising in the canteen shed or snoring by the wall. "Yes," said I, "the Republic, Mr Dooley, is surely your debtor."

"Sir, I am unable to deny it," said the modest Dooley.

"But doubtless you will have your reward," I continued. "Surely we may hope that soon your tongue will serve your country in the National Assembly."

Mr Dooley looked round. "Sir, you flatter me. By nature I am not ambitious, an' I confess that I would be loth to forego the charms of my simple hearth. Yet—yet—" Mr Dooley sat considering. "Well, I'm willin', sir. Should the Republic call me I am not the man to let private interests stand between me an' National duties. No, I'm not. But all this, Mr Shaw, is premature. Time will tell." He rose

and patted his paunch. "Shaw, you will honour me by steppin' inside to meet Mrs Dooley an' partake of the hospitality of my humble table? Only simple fare, sir, soldiers' fare; but such as it is you're kindly welcome."

In a cheerful room in the officers' quarters Mr Dooley's humble table was spread; and at it I sat down with Michael, and Sally his wife, and Teresa their eldest daughter. Sally was a wisened, weary-faced body, dressed in flowered silk and bestrewn with cheap jewellery; a down-trodden woman, I thought, who had learned to cultivate humility in the pastures of eloquence. Teresa was a sharp-faced damsel who had bloomed and faded but still kept hope alive in her withered heart; a frizzed and powdered colleen, who had eyes and knew how to use them, and a tongue that could trim the feathers of any gobbling bubbly-jock. It was Teresa who did the honours of Michael's humble board; it was she, I imagined, who in the great days that were coming would help Michael to discharge his National duties. Yes, Teresa's day was not yet past. Who knew but her eyes might some day lure to her feet some stammering Deputy? Perhaps it was poor tactics in the man Red Shaw to ignore their admiring glances? Dooley had money; Teresa had charms. . . . Tut. And Leah a prisoner in Emo.

We made a pleasant meal, for all that the fare was loot, even to the salt that Michael carried to his plate on a looted knife. We had tinned salmon and lobster and beef, tinned apricots and peaches, cheese and butter, bread and biscuits. Sally drank claret, Teresa lemonade, but Michael and I were content with whiskey, "Don't spare it, Shaw. There's plenty," said Michael

and glanced at the array of bottles that stood by the window. "Here's to the Republic," said he lifting his glass. "God bless it." I joined him in the toast, and the ladies joined also with hand and voice.

"Sir, they're great days," said Michael, "glorious times." "They are," said I, and ate a looted peach. "Miss Dooley, your very good health."

"Republics, sir, are great institutions," quoth Michael. "Every man free an' one as good as another. Sir, I give it as my conviction that the days we now see are the forerunners of long years of prosperity for Ireland." "I believe it," said I, and sipped Michael's looted whiskey. "Mrs Dooley, ma'am, my best respects."

"Who can stop us now?" asked Michael waving an airy hand. "What can hinder us? Our own trade, our own institutions, our own capital, our own revenues, money comin' in an' in, the last penny paid to the Saxon, our flag floatin' on the seas, our ambassadors at foreign courts, our own laws, our own tongue, our own country. Think of it," cried Michael in his chair, the light of inspiration flushing his face; "our own *Country*, I say! Ireland a nation at last! One man as good as another, an' our own Country for us all. By God," shouted Michael raising his arms, "the conception fills me with rapture. Had I the gift of words I could overflow with emotion. But—but—" His chin sank on his breast and he sat gazing at his empty glass, silent in contemplation.

For a minute no word was said. Up and down wagged Michael's inspired head. Sally sat leaning on the table, hands folded and her face troubled. I glanced at Teresa; our eyes met and fell; then to-

gether we rose. "I'm sorry, Miss Dooley," said I, "but business calls me. Thank you so much for your kindness. And you, Mrs Dooley. And you——"

Teresa came round the table. "Never heed him," whispered she. "Leave him to me." At the door she gave me her hand. "Good-bye, Mr Shaw, and any time you're in town we'll always be glad to see ye."

"Thank you, Miss Dooley. I'll not forget. Good-bye," I murmured; then flourished my hat and marched.

Full of the insolence of looted whiskey, I went up Main street, turned out of the Diamond along Station road, and coming to the Catholic chapel turned up along a trampled lane that led to the fair-green.

It was a cheerless spot, muddy and bare of grass, set on the slope of a hill, surrounded on three sides with whitethorn hedges and bounded on the fourth by a few cottages and a row of mud-walled cattle pens. The sun beat fiercely upon it. The blue sky mocked its nakedness. And in it were herded now, no driven cattle, but a crowd of Protestants swept in from two country-sides.

There were five or six hundred of them. In groups and clusters, the Gorteen men together, the men of Lackan and Clackan together, all the men from the districts round Bunn in flocks and herds, they were huddled; sitting on the mud walls, lying by the ditches, crowding over the green in the May sunshine. Some were only half clad, some had neither boots nor hats, a few were smoking or talking softly; but the majority took fate in silence, their faces heavy with shame and their eyes sullen. What thoughts were

theirs, what memories, what forebodings ; how great a depth of degradation was theirs, they, the elect of Protestant Ulster, gathered there like cattle at the mercy of Hillsiders brutal with drink and victory ! No wonder they looked dejected and ashamed. No wonder their eyes glared hate as I passed. For I was one of themselves. And now I had come to mock their shame, to glory in my triumph. Yet God knows I had not.

Half way up the hill a sergeant stood leaning on his rifle, and to him I put my questions. He said that the Protestants were only out for an airing ; that at night they were lodged in the station goods-store, in the church and town-hall ; that they had plenty of plain food, and that in a while, when things had settled down, some of them would go to the workhouse in Glann and the rest be kept in the church. "At present," said the sergeant, "we haven't men to guard them in droves, an' the goods-store is wanted, an' there's a meetin' in the town-hall ; so we've just marched them out here for a taste o' the sun. Sure it'll do them good. Sure they're too well off, so they are—nothin' to do an' their bellies full. Aw, begob, captain, it's meself'd be merry as the day's long in their place, so I would. But them ! Well, devil as hang-dog a company is outside o' Kilmainham this minute. Look at them," said the sergeant and spat on the fair-green.

I looked and pitied. Here was a blot on the fair prospect of our Republic. What, in heaven's name, was to become of these unfortunates ? Submission was not in their blood. Did the Republic last I could see nothing before them but banishment from home and

country? Surely it was hard. I pitied them and wanted to help them. Yet how could I? I who had ravaged their homes and left their women and children desolate; I one of themselves.

Thinking so I stood for a while by the sergeant; at last roused my courage—or maybe beat down my shame—and went among the groups down to a corner between two hedges. Here, sitting on the ditches and lying in the sunshine, were the men of Gorteen and Lackan and Clackan, the prisoners that I had gathered. James Mires, the first man I had taken, was there, seated on the ground with his head hanging. There sat Red Hugh Fallon, he who had charged me on the landing with a rusty bayonet, silent, grim, his eyes glowering red. Right in the corner, hands clasped about his up-gathered knees and an empty pipe in his mouth, was Red Bob, he who had said “Holy smoke, the Papishes are on us,” had left his bedridden wife and come out like a lamb. Out in the sunshine was David Graves, he who had drummed Gorteen awake and, with the six there around him, had defied Moran and Christy in his yard. Here sat William Johnston of Clackan whom we had found reading from *Isaiah* in the kitchen; here Charles Grieg his neighbour whom we had pulled from beneath the bed; here all the others whom Christy had driven in like sheep through wild Bilboa. Silently they watched me come, not an eye flinching, not a man stirring.

I greeted them cheerfully; but no one answered. I spoke to them kindly, offered them tobacco and money, promised to have Dooley give them special treatment, hoped that soon their troubles would end

and they get back to their homes ; but no one took my money and tobacco, or answered hope and promise with a word. Silently they sat in the corner, grimed, unkempt, famished, and repelled me with face and eye. "Renegade, traitor, murderer," their faces said. "Get back to your kind and leave us to our shame. We scorn and hate you, Red Shaw ; if our hands were free we would pull you limb from limb. But wait, wait," said their eyes ; "our time is coming, Shaw, our time is coming." And I, repelled and scorned, stood ashamed among them, shrinking from their eyes. Yet God knows how I pitied them, and wished to serve them, and admired the men they were. Surely it were an ill day for the Republic when these were cast out from its shores ? And in a hundred places over Ireland were herded a score of thousands as good as they.

But they would not answer me ; so reluctantly I turned to go. "At least," said I, "let me carry some message to your families ;" and with that Hugh Fallon spoke. "Tell them," said he, "that we fear nothin', an' hope nothin', but that we trust in God." "Ay, an' tell them," said David Graves, "that if they never see us again they'll know we died like men, shoutin' No surrender to the end." "That's it," went a voice from here and there, "tell them that. No surrender an' To Hell with the Pope."

These were not the messages I wished to carry ; but I feared to rouse them, and I saw the sergeant come striding down with his rifle. "Very good," said I. "I'll remember. Good day, men, and good luck." But as I turned James Mires rose and plucked at my tunic.

"Ye didn't hurt Mary an' the childer?" he whispered. "Tell me ye didn't."

"We hurt no women, James, not one. You'll find them waiting for you when you get back."

"Ay. Thank God for that. Tell them I'm well," said James, "an' that I mind them in me prayers. An' tell them not to fret, an' to be brave whatever happens."

"I will, James. You can trust me that far. God be with you, lad," said I; and went.

After that I had small heart for Bunn and its diversions. I called again at the barracks, found Dooley in bed and left my message with Sally; spent a while in the town-hall hearing Jerry Fitch the mayor thunder at a crowd of smoking citizens; left orders at the shops for stores (already tea was three shillings a pound and flour thirty shillings a bag) to be sent to Emo and the River house; went once more to the post-office and instructed Mrs Rainey (Teddy, she said, was up at the town-hall) to forward by messenger any letters that came; then mounted my horse and rode for Emo.

CHAPTER XI

THE HEART OF A DOG

THE road was empty now ; only children and chickens, with an old man sunning himself by a hedge or an old woman watching in a doorway, stirred near the cottages ; only cattle moved upon the hills, and in the valleys rooks toiled round the idle spades. A great peace held the country-side and upon it good sunshine was dowered wide. So, I supposed, all Ireland basked that day in peace and sunshine, heedless of trampled hills and desolate hearthstones, of herded prisoners and citizens who shouted Freedom in the streets.

I rode slowly between the hedges, reins loose on my horse's neck and my head down. Here and there my thoughts roved, from Bunn to Derry and down to Dublin and Cork, over Emo and Armoy, round trampled Gorteen and wasted Clackan and the White house ringed about with Leaguers. Yes, Ireland was free. The Saxon was driven. The Protestants were herded. Michael Dooley's long years of prosperity had begun. Soon government would be established, laws enforced ; soon Bunn would cease its diversions, the Protestants be freed, the country simmer down to its olden peace. All was over, the blow struck, the flag planted.

Yet, was all over? What of those herded Protestants, so sullen and enduring? What of those raving citizens—everywhere, everywhere, from Cork to Derry—so heedless, so unstable? What of the days that sure were coming, when food was scarce and loot scattered, when the commandoes were dispersed and strife grew in dividing the spoil; the days when the Republic, “now mistress of herself in prideful isolation,” must needs face the world in a fight for bare existence? The leaders, would they be faithful? The people, would they find wisdom? England, would she keep silent always, or would she but wait in patience till time gave her good chance? Ah, now that all was over, I saw much that aforetime was hidden, much that troubled my roving eyes. Over? Why, work was only beginning. The flag was only raised. The Republic, as Michael might have said, was yet in the throes of birth. Still had the leaders to prove themselves, and the people be tried. Still had England to speak. Still—ah, the bathos of it—had I to sweep the crest of Rhamus hill. Well, never mind. Whatever happens, thought I and raised my head, the sun will keep shining on the huddled hills.

Back at Emo I found the sun shining. The men were gambling again in the yard. Moran sat cleaning his rifle by the garden wall. Christy was basking on the doorstep, arms folded and his feet on a stool. Through the kitchen window I had sight of Susan scrubbing the table. From the barn doorway Sheehan looked down and waved me to come. “Ha. Back again, Shaw,” said he in his cheery way. “Had your dinner? Ay. Got the guns? So. Well, never heed. Come away up for a minute.”

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In my absence the Doctor had been working hard. From the house and from the empty houses in Lackan, beds had been fetched ; and on these lay the wounded (ten in all), clean, dressed and comfortable. On a table lay the Doctor's instruments. On another stood a bowl filled with spring flowers. The floor had been swept, all the sacks and loose straw cleared out. Through the skylight and doorway the sunshine streamed in and sweetened the place. I stood at the threshold looking and wondering, so great a change had been wrought in the musty old barn. "Why, doctor," said I, "you've worked miracles. Man, the difference. Why——" And there I stopped ; for down in a corner I saw Leah sitting by a bedside.

The Doctor had been watching me ; now he took me by an arm. "Didn't I tell you," whispered he, "I knew I could manage them. Tut, 'twas nothing at all. Five minutes settled the whole business. An' listen to me, Shaw. She's a brick. She has the nerve of a surgeon and the neatest hand I ever saw. But come till you see."

My heart was leaping as I followed Sheehan down between the beds, and came to Leah sitting beneath the skylight. Her back was towards us. From a bowl she was feeding one of the wounded with a spoon. At sound of our footsteps she looked round, met my eyes, frowned a little, and turned quickly. She looked pale, I thought, and worn ; but her brow seemed placid and her eyes soft. Her black hair was coiled loosely on her neck. Her arms were bared to the elbows. She wore a long white apron over her black dress, and a spray of hawthorn showed on her breast.

"Well, my dear," said Sheehan laying a hand on her shoulder; "an' how are we doing now? That's the way. Good, good. An' how are you feelin' yourself, James? Easier a bit? Grand, my boy; grand. Faith, we'll soon make a change in you. Look now, who I've brought to see you."

I was standing at the bed-foot. James looked at me and smiled. I answered his smile and spoke a cheery word or two; then went round the bed and faced Leah. She had risen and now stood beside the Doctor, one hand holding the bowl, the other hanging by her side. A flush, I thought, had come to her cheeks; but though I looked hard, and even spoke to her, she never raised her eyes or gave sign that she had heard. Lithe and upright, fresh and sweet, her black hair falling about her face and the hawthorn whitening her breast, Leah stood between the beds nor so much as scorned me with her eyes. When the Doctor spoke she answered softly, when James moaned she stooped to soothe; but me she ignored. It was hard. I stood on thorns. Yet what else might I expect? Was I not a butcher and a murderer?

I bore it for a while; then turned away and from bed to bed went down the barn, greeting the men with what cheer I could summon. All were patient and thankful for the mercies they had. "Sure it's not so bad, captain," said one; "it might easily ha' been worse. For a while we had it hard; but now——" His eyes turned towards Leah and the Doctor, and he ended with a smile. "Ah, no, captain," said another; "sure the pain's nothin' at all; no worse I'd think nor a toothache. Naw, I want nothin', captain, nothin' at all. Sure what could I want, an' them that good to me?"

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Presently the Doctor joined me, and we went down the ladder into the yard. I walked dolefully; but the Doctor laughed and clapped my shoulder. "Cheer up, sonny," said he; "sighin', man, is bad physic. Tut, Shaw. I'm ashamed of you."

"Yes," I replied. "Ah, it's easy to talk, Sheehan."

"Lord, to hear the man! Sure it's like the wind in a keyhole on a frosty night. An' for what? Just because of a woman's whim."

"But it's no whim," said I. "She means it all. I tell you she hates and despises me."

"An, damme, I admire her for it. Look at the set o' ye. Melancholy an' long in the face as a tinker's ass." The Doctor stopped and hooked me by the arm. "See here, captain Shaw, in your khaki regimentals, how would you take it if I christened you Faint-heart? By the Lord, man, if you don't pluck up I'll turn down my sleeves and court the girl myself. Away in with you, an' shave yourself, an' try to be a man—away, or dang me, I'll act deputy for Jan Farmer."

That roused me. "Jan Farmer," said I. "What do you know about Jan Farmer?"

"What I do; what all the country knows. He's beyond, isn't he?" said Sheehan, and looked towards Rhamus.

"And if he is?" I said stiffly.

"If he is make the most of your time whilst he's there. Enough," said Sheehan raising his hands. "I want to hear nothing an' I'm not going to meddle. It's between you, an' may the best man win." And he turned to the ladder.

Pondering what the Doctor had said and feeling

lighter of heart because of it, I crossed to the house, gave Christy my copy of *The Republic*, and went into the kitchen. There Susan, girt in a *praskeen* and with her sleeves turned up, was scouring the dresser. A big fire burnt below steaming pots and a frizzling oven. The hearth was tidy, the floor clean, the table white as a bone. In the ashes was an oven containing fried potatoes and a portion of Phil's Protestant goose, and by it a brown tea-pot.

"Ha, Mrs Hynes, it's yourself," said I. "Glad to see you, ma'am. Busy, I see?"

"Ah, yes," said Susan. "Sure it's better to be busy. What's the good o' mopin'? Ah, no." She turned down her sleeves and crossed to the hearth. "You'll be havin' your dinner, Mr Shaw?"

"Thank you kindly, ma'am, but I've had it." I hung hat and cloak on a nail and leant against the table. "So the Doctor's been persuading you, Mrs Hynes?"

"Ay. He has." Susan rolled up her sleeves and resumed her scrubbing. "Ah, he's a mighty pleasant man. Sure his face does one good to see, an' he always has the kindly word. Yes."

"You found it easy to humour him, then?"

"Ah, we did. Sure we may as well make the best o' things, anyway. What's the good o' mopin'? 'Better have somethin' to do,' says he; 'better keep your mind off things,' says he. An' then, sure, it went to our hearts to think of all them poor men lyin' outside on the straw. 'They'll die,' says he, 'if ye don't help me. They're pinin' for women's hands,' he says. An' so Leah came down to help him, an' I came meself. Ah, better be workin' nor pinin'?" sighed Susan. "What's the good o' pinin'?"

"None in the world, Mrs Hynes."

"Ah, no. Sure not a bit. Moanin' an' cryin' never brought the dead to life. Ah, no. Best to try to forget." She turned to me of a sudden with haunted, questioning eyes. "I suppose——?" she asked. "Ye haven't——?"

"No, Mrs Hynes, not yet. But I'm going in a while. Just now I'm tired; but in an hour I'll keep my promise and go to find John. I know I'll find him. Meanwhile, keep good heart and hope for the best."

"Ah, yes. I'm tryin'. But sure—Ah, John, man," wept Susan. "Where are ye, John?"

As it happened, however, I was not able that day to keep my promise to Susan; for about three o'clock the sun went out and rain fell in torrents. So all the afternoon Sheehan and I sat smoking in the parlour and discussing affairs, whilst in the kitchen Susan wept over her scrubbing, and the men gambled in the sheds, and Christy read *The Republic* to Moran in the dairy, and Leah watched in the barn. From time to time the doctor would rise from his chair, say, "Easy a minute, Shaw," and go out through the rain; presently would come back, fling his hat on the table, wipe his face with a silk handkerchief, and crashing into his chair would put his feet on the table, catch thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and say, "Well, where's this we were, captain, before I went my round?"

He made an excellent companion, frank, hearty, sympathetic, shrewd of speech, and a good listener. Dulness and he were no friends. His big laugh chased gloom. He had a trick of blinking rapidly

and of rubbing his bald crown by way of humouring thought ; and whenever his eyes twinkled and his lips twitched, something good was on the way. With myself, he thought the Republic had far to go before the flag was planted ; but his future was rosier than mine. "Give them time, Shaw," he would say. "It's natural for slaves to shake a leg when freedom comes. To-day the pot's boilin' over, to-morrow or next day it'll simmer down, before a week you'll have it tepid on the hearth. It's the nature of us. Like champagne we run easily to froth ; but where's the froth when it comes to drinkin' ? Pooh. You'd never judge tobacco by the smoke it makes." And gathering his lips he would blow a cloud at the ceiling.

About five o'clock Susan came in, laid the cloth and clattered down the tea things, put here a pound of looted butter on a plate, and there a looted loaf, and in the middle a soda cake hot from the oven ; at last carried in a big tea-pot, set it among the cups, said, "Tay'll be ready," and with a sigh turned to go. But the Doctor stopped her. "Ah, but easy, ma'am," said he ; "sure this is no way to treat us at all, at all. Is it leave a parcel o' clumsy bachelors you'd do to their devices round your table ? Tut, tut, Mrs Hynes. Why you've more heart than all that. Now just sit down there, ma'am, I beg ye, an' honour us with your presence. Come on with you both," said the Doctor to Christy and Patrick as they came shuffling in with their hats in their hands, "take your places, me sons, till Mrs Hynes pours tea for you. That's the way. Come, Shaw, my lad. . . . But where's herself, now ? Where's my partner ? Tut. This'll never do. Tut —tut," said the Doctor and went bustling out.

He was gone many minutes. In silence we sat waiting, Christy and Patrick eyeing the hot cake, Susan looking mournfully at the streaming window, myself listening expectantly. Presently I heard footsteps in the kitchen and sound of the Doctor's voice; then the door opened and in he came with Leah. "Sorry to have kept you," said he; "but I had to renew a dressing. Now, my dear, just sit there between the captain an' myself, an' make yourself at home. Come, Shaw. Wake up, man, before Christy finishes that hot cake. Now, Mrs Hynes, ma'am, I'll trouble you for a cup o' your strongest. That's the way. Sure this is what I like to see—plenty on the table an' the best o' good company. Ah me, what'd the world be without the women? Think of us now, lads; an' think of us this mornin' striving here like Connaught men round the family potato basket. . . ."

So the Doctor rattled on, and I for one was grateful to him. Maybe Leah was grateful also; for like myself she sat ill at ease, her shoulders rigid and her face averse. Only when I passed her cup or offered her something would she give me notice, and that just a cold word of thanks or a colder turn of the head. Only to the Doctor would she speak and her smiles were all for him. No word for me, no smile at all; nothing but contumely and scorn. She shrank from me as from some loathsome thing—an insect, or a crawling reptile. Were not my hands red? Had I not slain her kith and kin, ravaged her country-side, led her away prisoner, shut out her Jan to wanderings in the rain? Had I not overthrown her little world, killed her peace, blighted the roses of her youth and beauty? Can you wonder that she shrank from me?

Can you wonder that I sat miserable? Yet was it not good to have her there beside me, to hear her voice, to see her smile, to have glimpses at times of her drooping hair and rounded cheek? Even though she scorned me, yet was it not well?

Tea being over and the rain continuing, Leah went back to the barn and Susan to her moping in the kitchen; but Moran and Christy, the Doctor and myself, spent the evening in the parlour, arguing, squabbling, smoking, drinking and playing cards. We had great diversion. About eleven o'clock Moran and Christy reeled off to bed; nearing midnight Sheehan emptied his tumbler, yawned and rose. "Well, good-night to you, Shaw," said he; "good dreams and good luck. It's been a full day an' a stirrin' evening; but let us hope to-morrow may bring no worse."

"Amen, doctor," said I, and rose to keep him company to the barn. But before he reached the door I stopped him. "There's one thing, Sheehan, I want to ask you. Do you think Miss Hynes knows that Jan Farmer is out in the rain on Rhamus hill?"

He turned, came back and stood spraddled before the fireplace. "I'm no thought-reader, captain," he said. "How could I tell what Miss Hynes knows?"

"Oh, by guessing, Sheehan. Doctors, you know, are good at that. Come, tell me like a man."

"H'm. You're the divil at compliments, Shaw." He stood swaying on his toes, his hands clasped behind him. "H'm. Yes, I'd think Miss Hynes does know."

"And why, doctor?"

"Oh, through guessin', Shaw; through guessin'."

"You're the devil at evasions, Sheehan. Come, answer me."

"I've answered you, Shaw. You're wishful I suppose to make me hit ye. Well, I'll not oblige you this time." He came over and clapped me on a shoulder. "Look here, lad; take a fool's advice and pull that kink out o' your temper. You're a good kind o' chap, but there's times when I feel inclined to kick you. Maybe Miss Hynes has the feelin' too. Chut, man. You're old enough to know better. . . . And for your question, don't you think that the girl has been wonderin' in herself who filled the hurdles last night? And haven't you learnt yet that a woman has the gift o' seein' across a valley when there's someone she likes on the hill beyond? Eh, my bold hero?"

I stood looking at the window. "Well, perhaps so," I answered. "No doubt you're right, Sheehan. And she's said nothing to you?"

"Not a word, Shaw. But I've noticed her standin' at the barn door lookin' across the valley."

"Ah! Then she knows . . . Well, no matter. It can make no difference, except that we'll have to watch her closer. It would never do if she crossed the valley. No." I had been thinking aloud; now I looked up and met Sheehan's twinkling eyes. "You must think me a pretty idiot, doctor? You'll have a lot to forgive me?"

"No more than is due to an idiot, Shaw," answered he with a laugh. "Ah, man, you're young, an' yours is a deadly complaint. But unravel the kink, Shaw," said the Doctor, then turned for the door.

The next morning was fine. Susan prepared our breakfast and sat with us while we ate it, but even Sheehan could not persuade Leah to leave the barn.

"One of the boys is feverish," said he, " an' she won't leave him." I smiled at the excuse, and thereafter sat glum.

Breakfast over I inspected the posts round Rhamus, then left Christy in charge of Emo, and with O'Hea and ten men rode off down the Bunn road towards Armoy.

All was quiet in Lackan. Among the orchards and poplars the Protestant houses stood empty, with fowls clucking hungrily in the yards and a pig squealing here and there in a sty. Sometimes we met women trudging with baskets into Bunn ; once or twice had sight of a scared face at a Protestant window. Where the barricade had been, a few carts stood by the ditch and on the road were ugly stains ; but the women had gathered their dead. M'Avey's yard was empty now ; in its gateway an old man and a group of children shouted as we passed.

At Lackan bridge we turned to the left and rode into Armoy. Here was life enough, the road dotted with Hillsiders, the houses by it astir. Women waved their aprons in the doorways and ancients shook their blackthorns, children skirled on the roadside, at intervals one of the Commando cheered on a hillside or greeted us from a field. Once we lined up by the hedges and bared our heads as a funeral went by, the coffin on a donkey's cart, the women keening behind. And once a woman rushed from a house, raised arms to heaven and cursed those who had left her desolate.

From house to house where lay the wounded we passed, to many a house where the dead lay stretched between the candles we went ; and in all found peace.

It was God's will, said the women; sure what He sent was good. Ah, yes, they were comfortable, said the wounded, lying patient in peat-scented rooms on their narrow beds; they had nothing to complain of, and sure, anyway, they were glad to be at home. "What's the news, captain?" asked one as I sat by his bedside; and when I had told him that Ireland was free he smiled and said, "Thank God for that. Man, I'm better this minute." "An' did we beat them, captain?" asked another who had fallen on Rhamus hill; and when I shook my head he answered, "Well, no matter. Sure their time'll come." I felt many a qualm as I sat by those humble bedsides.

In Gorteen it was otherwise. There the roads were empty, fields deserted, houses quiet amid the orchards and fir-groves. At sight of us the children ran in terror from the yards and the women shrank from door and window. I crossed no threshold in Gorteen, sat by no bedside and saw no shrouded dead. Through a desolate land we hurried that morning, past the fields we had trampled, the houses we had ravaged; children running at sight of us and women hiding their stricken faces. Did the widows curse us, I wonder, and the wounded mutter as we passed?

At the house of James Mires, on the slope above Hillside, I stopped and gave Mary her husband's message. She stood haggard before me in the doorway, the children holding her skirts. "He's well, Mrs Mires," said I, "and bids me tell you not to fret, and to be brave whatever happens." She answered nothing till I turned to go, then clutched my arm. "They'll not kill him?" she whimpered. "Ah, tell me

they won't." I gave her assurance; and with a "Thank God" she closed the door.

To the doorway of Red Bob's cottage I came and through the smoke gave a message to Jenny, Bob's bedridden wife. "He's well, Mrs Lunny," I called, "and you'll see him soon. Be brave for a while. He won't be long." And back through the smoke came only a hopeless moan.

I stood long at the door of Red Hugh Fallon's before Jane, his daughter, opened to me. Pale and resolute, hands folded and eyes steady, she stood in the hall and heard my message. "We're thankful to ye," said Jane. "If ye see father again tell him that he has our prayers an' we trust in God." "I will," I answered; and added, "I'm sorry for all this, Mrs Hynes. It's hard, I know; but maybe when he comes back, you'll try to forgive me." Jane looked at me a moment, straight and pitilessly. "Forgiveness is not with us," said she; and shut the door.

At other doors in Gorteen it was much the same: a stammering message from me, hard eyes answering and a few plain words. Not in my life have I done harder duty. Had I choice again, gladly would I rather face the perils of trench or barricade than the eyes of those Protestant women.

But it ended at last; then quickly we rode back to Lackan bridge and up along the ridge of Clackan. Duty was done; now to keep my promise to Susan.

We spread across the slope and carefully searched everywhere; came in a while to the white house on the hill, Leah's home nestling snug among the poplars and apple trees, and halted there. In and out we went, through the house and all the offices, and found

no John ; but I noticed that the bed was tumbled and the hearth warm, so telling O'Hea to stable my horse and to ride on towards Curleck, I shut the kitchen door and sat down in a corner.

I was thinking of Leah, recalling the hour when she stood by the chair and scorned me, when a stealthy foot sounded in the yard. At once I rose, drew my revolver, and waited with my back to the hearth. Soon the latch lifted, the door opened, and in came John.

He had a fowling-piece in his hand, and at sight of me (for all his surprise) he raised it. But I was too quick for him. "Hands up," I ordered, my revolver covering him. "Hands up, you dog." Slowly he turned, his eyes always upon me, laid the gun on the table and flung up his arms. "I give in," he shouted. "Don't shoot, Shaw ; don't shoot."

I ordered him to the middle of the floor ; dropped my hand and stood eyeing him. His knees shook, fear haunted his eyes. "Well, my bold hero," said I ; "so I've got you at last. You thought to escape me, did you ? Ah, well you may shake in your shoes, you cowardly dog. Listen to me, John Hynes. Do you remember the night when you sat there and sickened me with your brag of what you'd do to the Catholic cut-throats ? Eh, John, my man ? And now where's your brag, and what have you done ?"

He stood silent before the dresser, his beard on his breast. A minute I waited ; then spoke again. "What did you do that night, John ? Where were you, John, when I called to see you ?"

He looked up. "I—I was in the haystack," he stammered.

"Ay. You were, John. 'Twas warmer there than in here with your wife and daughter. You left them to their fate and saved your own miserable skin. My bold John!"

He looked up again. "Ah, but no," said he. "You're too hard on me. Sure I didn't leave them. I—I knew you'd never hurt them."

"Yes. And so you slunk off to the haystack, leaving them to think you were away fighting the cut-throats. My knowing lad! But tell me, John," said I of a sudden. "Did anything happen to them? Did you find them here when you came back?"

"Naw. I didn't. They were gone. An' the gig an' pony were gone. An'——" He stopped on a stammer.

"Yes. And you've been trying to find them ever since? Maybe you were out searching for them with that?" said I and looked at the fowling-piece.

"Naw. I wasn't. Sure where could I search? Sure I daren't venture far. Aw, no."

"Aw, no. You'd risk the skin, John? And where do you think they are?"

"Ah, God knows," came back.

"Yes, God knows," said I; "and you don't care."

"Care? Don't care? Lord, Shaw, that you could say that to me! Man, d'you think I've no heart?"

"I've been doubtful till this minute. But no matter about your heart, John. Where's your wife and daughter, I ask?"

He stood wagging his tangled beard. "God knows," he said; then looked at me. "D'you know yourself, Shaw?"

"I? You ask me?" I laughed aloud. "What should I know about them, my simple John? Do you think I care that?" and I snapped my fingers. "No, and I care less for you, my man. Come, get on your coat. The cut-throats are waiting for you down the road."

Then fear took John again and he stood trembling. "What! You'd shoot me, Shaw. You'd let them murder me!" He came at me with pleading arms; but I stopped him quick. "Get on your coat, you dog," said I, "and march."

With John trudging in front, I rode towards Curleck; presently overtook O'Hea and the ten, and with John in the midst of us went on. Sometimes he looked up at me, sometimes pleaded a word; but I gave him no heed. "March, you dog," was the best he got. Yet often enough on the way I smiled at myself, and often pitied John. As a Protestant he might be unworthy, but he had a heart.

Past the burnt cottages of the Catholics and past their blood-stained fields we went, over the wooden bridge into Curleck, thence up through the oak plantation, between Clackan lough and Thrasna river, and came again to Emo. It was now three o'clock. In the yard Christy was reading *The Republic* to Moran and the men. In the barn doorway Sheehan stood smoking in his shirt-sleeves. At the kitchen window I saw Susan's tearful face. Dismounting I took John by the collar, led him to the porch and pushed him across the threshold. "Get in, you dog," said I; then turned and hurried to the barn.

Leah and the Doctor were sitting by a bedside. Without any greeting I came to them. "Miss Hynes,"

I said, "your mother wants to see you. Oblige me by going to her at once."

She rose, a flush on her cheeks and her hands clenched; looked at me and then at the Doctor. "You heard me?" I went on. She did not move or speak. "Come," said I sternly with an impatient stamp; "I'm master here and I wish to be obeyed. Your mother wants you, I say." And silently, head high and arms rigid, Leah went between the beds along to the ladder.

I stood watching her go, till a hand was laid on my shoulder and the Doctor spoke. "Bravely done," said he. "That's the way to manage them. But, man, Shaw, what about that kink of yours?"

"Oh, damn your kink," I shouted; and strode away.

CHAPTER XII

OUR HILLSIDE NEST

I SLEPT an hour in Jan's room, and at five o'clock came down to tea in the parlour. The table was laden with good things, hot soda cake, hot potato cake, hot griddle scones, tinned beef and mutton and salmon, jam in a pot, butter on a lordly dish ; the table cloth was clean and on it was spread the best of Emo's china. I judged it to be a feast given to welcome the Prodigal.

We made quite a party, and merry withal. Susan's face shone with happiness. Beside her was John, a little shamefaced maybe, a little afraid of myself and somewhat doubtful of Moran the fox and Christy the sapient, yet on the whole not despondent. The Doctor was in his merriest vein. At my elbow sat Leah, thoughtful at times and a little reserved, yet scornful no longer. An hour and its happenings had worked great change in her ; had woke joy and youth in her again, softened her, made of her the same Leah, with the apple cheeks and sunny eyes, whose face had been my fate. In her black dress was a spray of pink hawthorn ; a red ribbon bound her black hair. When she turned to speak a word to me, or to smile a response, I had sight of her low wide forehead, with the hair shadowing it and the grey eyes livening it,

and the apple cheeks flowing down to the parted lips. It was good. I blessed the Prodigal. I overran with kindness and good humour. I sat robed and crowned. For behold the lions and the lambs sipping good Congo together (good omen surely of a Republic new-born); and see Leah gracious at my side. What cared I, that evening, if she looked sometimes across the valley towards Rhamus, and what if she were thoughtful at times and reserved? Jan was there. Yes. But I was here. And Leah sat smiling.

Tea being done, I shut myself in the parlour with Susan and John and talked seriously to them. My duty was, I said, to send John to Bunn fair-green; my wish was to send Susan and Leah home; my pleasure was, however, neither to do my duty just now nor humour my wish. John was to consider himself my prisoner, with leave on occasion to visit Clackan; to Susan I put it, artfully you will understand, that for John's sake and their own safety it might be well, at present, for herself to keep house in Emo and for Leah to help the Doctor in nursing the wounded. "You'll be safe here, Mrs Hynes, and comfortable as you wish. You'll be repaying me for—well, for John. And your daughter, I think, will never regret the good she may do to those unfortunate men. Come, what do you say?" said I and looked at them both.

Both at that minute, so thankful was John to have escaped death so happy was Susan to see him alive, would have agreed to anything, even I think to my marrying Leah; easy for them, then, to do my wish. John was all gratitude and thanks for my generosity to him and his, Susan all grateful tears. "Ah, we deserve nothin' from ye, Mr Shaw," wept she, "for we

treated ye hard. I mistrusted ye, an' Leah did worse, an' John sure could never have expected what you're doin'. Ah, we're sorry, sir, an' my own heart's full of gratitude to ye; an' we'll do all we can for ye, Mr Shaw. . . ." So Susan and John, through a moving hour; and so it was arranged.

Thereafter, for a while, things went smoothly in Emo. A succession of beautiful days (heaven's blessing, Christy said, on our New Ireland) came timely; and through them we all went gladly, thankful to be alive, thankful to Providence (again I quote Christy) for all its mercies to us. Indeed we had need to be thankful. Abundance of wholesome food, plenty of excellent drink, good weather, good company, good health, a good house to live in; what in life could we ask for more? Nothing to do but laugh and grow fat, nothing to pay, nothing to fear (except it were a bullet from Rhamus or a raid at night by the Master); surely we had need for thanks, though to whom I dare not say and for what I hardly knew. But certain it was that Republics, in the words of Citizen Dooley, were grand institutions. "Great times, captain," said Christy one day, we meeting on the gravelled avenue over which it was now his daily habit to strut majestically, hat over an eye and hand across his strategic breast; "aw, the best o' times. Man, it's like takin' the salt water down at Kyle. I feel years younger this last week. I do so. Aw, be the powers, great times an' great weather; an' sure," said he looking about him, "a grand spot to live in. Ay, it is. I'd—I'd——"

Christy checked himself in time, but I guessed his thought. "Yes, it's a grand place," said I. "The Master beyond must be proud of it. Poor man, he's

worked hard to make it what it is ; and now he's done with it. One of these days, I suppose, someone who knows his business will have it all."

"Eh?" Christy was round on his heel in a second. "Ye think that, Shaw? Ye think all the Protestants will be transported and their land divided among us? Because—because——" Christy stood gaping at the hedge, words swamped by the rush of his thoughts.

"Because you'd like Emo for your share, Christy?" crooned I, my eyes sly upon him.

"Eh?" He started awake and flushed to his big ears. "Ah, not at all," he protested. "Man, what are ye thinkin' about? Is it the like o' me have a place like this! Nonsense, Shaw," said Christy with a wave of his hand ; then marched along the avenue. I stood watching him. Before he had gone ten yards his head fell ; before he had reached the gate he was striding in reverie along the primrose path, owner already, by gift of a grateful Republic, of this fair land of Emo. It was splendid. And think you that Christy was the only dreamer in Ireland that glad May morning?

We had our distractions, of course, and our excitements. Secluded though we were, and far removed from the stir of great emprises, our nest on the hill-side had its own periods of unrest, its times of invasion by outside things. Around us the country was still simmering. Bunn had not yet tired of diversion. Mrs Rainey had now mastered the machine, trains were running somehow, the mails came sometimes. Every day brought us *The Republic*, with its stores of news and wastes of comment, its patient survey of all that was local and petty, its blind disregard of all that

mattered—the big issues, the things outside, the things that might come after. Frequently the women came in from Armoy to see their husbands, at intervals the men went home to work or rest. From all sides visitors flocked in to see sport, as they expressed it; and often some grumbled because we did not attack for their pleasure, or give them sight of a Leaguer in his death agony. News came to us of the doings at Enniskillen, Louth castle, Lismahee, and places else within our knowing. At times we heard the rifles cracking round the White house down by Garvagh ferry. Occasionally a spent bullet would come greeting us from Rhamus across the valley; twice we woke the Master at midnight with noise of sham attacks, twice Jan rushed our posts in quest of forage and water. Also came a night when I sprang from sleep at sound of the rifles cracking and of Moran calling out the guard. “What’s wrong?” I shouted through Jan’s window. “A spy, or somebody, from beyond,” answered Moran; “but we’ve sent him back wi’ a flea in his lug.” I stayed at the window till all was quiet again; then, feeling wakeful, went downstairs to the landing and looked towards Rhamus. No spy was in sight, nothing save dim shapes of tree and hedge and hill. Yet stay. Was that a figure gliding past the paddock? Yes. No. Soon I turned again for bed, saying that I had been only dreaming. But afterwards I knew that had I stayed on the landing five minutes longer my eyes would have opened wide.

Then, of course, being Irishmen, we had our sociable hours, our friendly talks, our arguments, our fiery discussions. “Ah, dear me, such doin’s, such doin’s,” Susan would moan, the while Christy read to a full

kitchen an account of the fighting in Belfast; and Moran's eyes would glitter at sight of such diversion, then seek mine with a long deadly look half wonder and half scorn. "Now, now, to think o' that, an' it not fifteen miles from where we're sittin'," John would say when Christy had finished *The Republic's* report from its own correspondent at Enniskillen; or, "Lord, Lord," would he exclaim when the siege of Derry was described, or, "Listen to that now," when Christy had rolled out a paragraph in which were immortalised the deeds of captain Shaw and the Red Leaguers. "Ay, listen to that now," would bark the grey fox, his baleful eyes still hard upon me. "Troth we've need to be proud, sittin' here at our ease an' work to be done. Ach, I'm sick of it." And Moran would spit on the hearth, and put his chin in his hand and sit glowering at the fire.

Still these things only served to enliven our pastoral days. Really we were quite happy, contented with our lot and thankful for mercies given. Moran, for all his barking and scowling, was not dissatisfied; he as well as another being alive to the advantages of rest and sunshine, a full stomach, and prospect some day of a share in the spoil. Christy had his primrose path. The men were happy as cattle in clover, nothing to do but eat and ruminate. John did my bidding like any slave, his one trouble being constant dread of the cut-throat Moran. Susan toiled unweariedly in kitchen and parlour. In the barn Leah and the Doctor did noble service. I spent bright hours with them there. It gladdened me to have Sheehan's company, never did I tire of watching Leah's face. I spoke to her little and seldom—for I knew how torn she was be-

tween her feeling of gratitude and her instinct of loyalty—and then only on petty outside matters; but always she answered me and often was friendly. It was enough—almost.

In all my dallying I never lost sight of duty. Rigorously the cordon was kept round Rhamus. Almost every day our sharpshooters, in command of the fox, worried the Protestants from plantation or hedge; twice, as I have said, we broke their sleep. Some nights I spent on the hillside, watching and listening; every day I rode into Bunn, not as you may think to see Teresa, but hoping to have word of the guns. But no word came. Six times I wrote, often got Mrs Rainey to work the machine in my service; and always without result, till at last one day three successive telegrams brought answer that my communications had been received and were under consideration. I knew what that implied, and thereafter asked no more. Rhamus I saw must either be starved into submission, or carried desperately by aid of Michael Dooley.

One morning, however, the boom of guns came to us from the direction of the White house; and having sent O'Hea to make enquiries, he brought back word that Phil Gara, who commanded the Loughsiders, had found three old cannon in a yard, had placed one on Devenish island and trained it upon the House. It was but a smooth bore, rusty and unmounted, neither had it so far proved to be destructive of more than powder; still it was a gun and maybe capable in skilful hands of knocking holes in Rhamus. So once more I sent O'Hea to interview Gara, and this time his answer was that did captain Shaw help

captain Gara to make a night attack on the House, one of the guns, or maybe all three, would be at the captain's service. I sent my compliments to captain Gara, offered to come with a hundred picked men, and asked him to fix his night. Captain Gara returned my compliments, accepted my offer, and fixed Thursday night in that week. Agreed thereupon and arrangements made.

About seven o'clock, then, on the Thursday evening, Moran and O'Hea and I, with three carts to bring back the guns and ammunition (to say nothing of dead and wounded), led our hundred picked men down the road through Lackan and Gorteen, on towards Garvagh ferry.

Passing through the plantation that lies within hail of the ferry, we heard rifles crackling in front and a distant noise of cheering ; but this excited us nothing. Gara is preparing a way, thought we, and clattered on through the firs.

At the ferry, six Loughsiders were waiting with the great boat, called a cot I think, which by means of heavy sweeps and a lug sail, was used to carry goods and passengers between Garvagh and the Lismahee shore. The Loughsiders were excited. Something was happening beyond, they made sure. All the more reason for haste, said we ; then in two parties crossed over Lough Erne to the pier on Lundy island. A beautiful night it was, soft and peaceful. The water was full of stars. All along the shores stood the trees, on guard like ghostly sentinels before the hills and the cottages upon them, and the White house high on its own hillside.

Our rendezvous was the boathouse which lies below

the House within pistol-shot of the pier ; and here we should have found the captain. But no captain was there and not a Loughsider. It seemed strange enough. Had Gara played us false, or had the garrison sallied victoriously ? As best I might I disposed the men about the boathouse ; then with O'Hea and Moran went up a gravelled path, darkened with laurels and hazels, that led us soon into the House grounds.

Even here was no sign of the captain and his men. The grounds were quiet. The walks, winding in and out of the sward between trees and flower beds, were empty. Cautiously from shrub to shrub we glided ; presently issued on a pleasure ground and saw the House before us.

It was a great square building, with a florid stucco front, and surrounded on two sides by a wide terrace. To the right lay a walled garden, to the left a wood that hid the stables and offices. Nearly all the windows were black ; but a flood of light lay upon the terrace that overlooked the garden. And out of the light, so to speak, into the silence and darkness came a distant sound of revelry.

Like cats we stole between the flower beds, edging across towards the lighted terrace. Once I stumbled over something soft, bent and laid my hand on a dead Loughsider ; again a groan caught my ear, and turning I found a man dying among the flowers. On the steps lay other figures, huddled and still.

Bidding Moran and O'Hea stand quiet, I went on tip-toe along the terrace and stopped before one of the lighted windows. It was wide open, and through it I had sight of the Loughsiders revelling

at a long white table. Shouts, skirls, wild cries of triumph, the crash of feet and clinking of glasses, came out into the darkness. I stood in sight and hearing of Pandemonium.

In a while I beckoned to Moran and O'Hea, stepped quietly to the window and climbed in. All were so engrossed that no one noticed my coming. Wax candles in silver sticks stood on the table; above it a branched candelabrum flung a mellow light on panelled wall and gilded picture, on the glittering side-board and open fire-place. The table was littered with napkins, plate, glass, with bottles and decanters by the score; and round it, or sitting upon it, or in groups on the polished floor, were the Loughsiders in mad abandonment, shouting, singing, guzzling, every face and voice brutal with riot. The confusion, the whirl and clatter, above all that swinish greed, were horrible. It was an orgy, a glimpse of hell.

I was about to speak, when Moran, in coming through the window, slipped on the polished floor and falling heavily brought the Loughsiders to their feet. Instantly a dozen rifles were levelled; but at head of the table a red-headed man, tall and powerful, ordered them down. "Steady there, men," he shouted; "down with them, I say": then, to me, "It's captain Shaw, I'm thinkin'? Ha, I thought so." He came towards me with outstretched hand. "Glad to meet ye, Shaw, an' sorry to disappoint ye." On the polished floor, there in sight of Dunskee and all his ancestors, we met and greeted like good citizens of the Republic; then crossed to the table and in flowing bumpers drank prosperity to Ireland, our-

selves, each other, and confusion to all our enemies. "Lads," shouted Gara, springing upon a chair, "here's to Ireland, God bless her; here's to all her sons, God bless them; an' here's to the health of our brothers in arms, captain Shaw an' the Armoy commando." Enthusiastically the toast was honoured, madly my response was acclaimed; and the orgy went on.

"It's like this, Shaw," said Gara in a while, his elbows on the table and a cigar in his fingers; "we're an independent lot this side o' the water, an' naturally we like to do our own work—thanks to yourself all the same. So this evenin' as dusk fell I says to the lads, Supposin' now we have another try before the Armoy boys come. If we fail no matter; if we win all the better. Sir," said Gara with a twist of his red head, "they just rose at me. Then I got them ready accordin' to a plan I had; at the word we slapped at them like blazes; some of us went down, but hell was in us an'—an' here we are. Ay, we're here, Shaw. Man, 'twas great. Hell was in us, sir; an' I'll say it that me plan went on wheels. 'Twas a stroke of genius. Wait now till I tell ye about it. . . ."

The description of Gara's stroke and the manner of its fall took many minutes. I found the captain to be shrewd and voluble, dogmatic, and not burdened with modesty. He gave me to understand that he was a born general, hinted that captain Gara in captain Shaw's place would soon turn Rhamus upside down, offered me his services and his counsel; at last wandered into an account of the way he had taken the impudence out of the Marquis and his family, when the great stroke had fallen. "I just

wiped my boots on the lot of them. 'Good evenin' to ye, me lord,' says I with a sweep of me hat; 'an' yourself, me lady, an' the rest o' ye, me Protestant dogs. Sorry to interrupt ye at dinner,' says I. 'Let me introduce ye, me lord,' says I, 'to the boys that's whipped ye an' that'll collect your rents in future. You've lost your title now, me boy,' says I, 'an' it's plain Mr Dunskee you'll be from this same evenin'. But never heed,' says I, 'we'll care ye well, an' one o' these days maybe you'll have the pleasure o' drivin' a cart on your own estate.' I did," laughed Gara, with a thump on the table. "Troth I did, just like that. Wasn't it great, Shaw? Didn't I do it well?"

"You did," answered I. "But what have you done with them all?"

"Come away till I show ye," said Gara, and emptying his tumbler rose.

We left the dining-room, went along a corridor and into the library. It was dimly lighted with candles. Two Loughsiders stood on guard at the door; two paced up and down between the shelves. And crowded together, sitting on the floor, standing in groups, some wounded, all silent and spiritless, were the beaten Protestants—servants of the house, labourers, workmen, and some tenants from the Loughside who had escaped my net. "Here's some o' them," said Gara as we passed in and out. "A lively lot, aren't they? But wait a minute."

Back along the corridor Gara opened another door and led me into a great drawing-room. It also was lighted with candles and guarded by Loughsiders; full of softness and beauty it was, the walls were blue, the ceiling was carved, and here among the

gilded chairs and silken couches, helpless in the midst of so much luxury, were herded the mighty Dunskees.

By the fire-place stood my Lord, a spare grizzled man with a long beard and a proud face, his forehead cut and his shirt-front splattered. Near him was my Lady, tall, stately, very beautiful. By the window their eldest son lay on a couch, his head bandaged, his wife kneeling by him. On another couch a child in white, with a blue sash and blue slippers, slept peacefully, her black hair streaming over a crimson cushion, and an arm flung out. In a group stood three ladies and five men, all in evening dress; the chaplain among them and two lads in velvet suits, with lace collars and silver buckles on their shoes. The ladies were pale, the men flushed. From the famished look of everyone, I judged that the Loughsiders had found more wine than meat upon the dinner-table.

Gara swaggered in, flung himself on a chair before my Lord, stretched his legs, tilted his hat and blew a stream of smoke at the ceiling. "Well, Dunskee, an' how are ye gettin' on, now? Hungry, eh? Troth an' I'm that way myself a bit, for all that I've been strivin' this while back to make up with the drink. Good evenin' to yourself, ma'am. Glad to see ye again." He jerked his thumb towards myself standing out between door and fire-place. "This'll be captain Shaw, Dunskee, of the Armoy commando. 'Twas him cleared the Protestants from Gorteen an' Clackan. Ay, 'twas. Come over, Shaw, an' make your bow."

I did not move or speak. The Marquis just

glanced at me. My Lady sat looking across at the sleeping child. Back among the chairs the group stood silent, their eyes contemptuous on captain Gara. But he only settled in his chair, spat noisily on the carpet, and slowly looked about the room.

"Ay. Troth it's an elegant place you're in, Dunskee," said Gara, "yourself an' the rest o' ye. I wonder now how much o' the tenants' money went to find all this grandeur. Aw, to be sure. An' now the tenants are masters, Dunskee, an' you're their prisoner. Well, divil mend ye, say I. You've brought it on yourself, me man. Ah, I know ye. Your father was a decent kind, for all that he was hard an' drove us sore. He knew his duty an' tried to do it, an' any of us that had a grievance, Dunskee, had only to come to the terrace there an' he'd hear it. But that's not your kind. No. Sure your duty was only to lord it over us, an' drag all ye could from us, an' 'twas the agent that'd hear our complaints. To be sure. What were the divils of Irish to you but pigs that paid the rent; an' when your pockets were full away it was with ye to England to empty them. Not a penny-piece ever came back to the pigs of tenants; aw, not one. If ye wanted an ounce o' tobaccy you'd send to England for it. Yes, ye would. . . . An' now there ye stand, you an' your big shirt-front, an' it's me, Dunskee, that's sittin'. Ye see me. Ah, divil mend ye. I pity ye nothin'. You an' your like have been the curse of Ireland, the tyrants an' the oppressors of it. Ye made the laws an' ye administered them. Ye ground the poor an' never pitied them. Ye did, by God. No mercy an' no justice," shouted Gara springing to his feet,

"nothin' but hardness an' pride an' robbery. But now it's done. Ye hear me," shouted Gara, his fist at my Lord's face, "it's done for ever. You're down ; damn ye, you're down !"

All through Gara's tirade the Marquis had stood silent before the fire-place, his hands behind him, his face rigid ; now he flinched a little, and his face paled. His son rose from the couch. The men gathered round. From the door the Loughsiders came hurrying. Quickly I crossed to Gara and clutched his arm. But it was my Lady who ended the scene. Stepping to my Lord's side she raised a hand. "Hush. The child will wake," she said ; then looked at Gara pleadingly, her eyes soft with promise of tears. "The child is ill," said she. "May I ask your pity for her sake?"

Gara stood gaping. His hands fell. Slowly he turned and nodded at the couch. "Is it herself?" he asked.

"Yes," said my Lady ; and with that crossed over, knelt by the child and bent over it.

It was the simplest device, and touching enough. What Gara felt I know not. Perhaps he had children of his own. Perhaps the woman in my Lady stirred deep in him somewhere, say in his wild Irish heart, and wrought kindly there. Enough that he was stirred. His face softened. Uncovering his head he went on tiptoe across to the couch, and bending, with a hand on each knee, stood looking at the child. "Would she be very bad?" he asked.

"Yes," said my Lady.

"Ah, now. Sure I didn't know. Poor wee thing. Och, sure I didn't know." Strange to see this savage

transformed, and to hear his plaining voice. "But look, ma'am, we've a doctor with us. Couldn't I send him to see her?"

"Yes, yes," said my Lady. "If you would, please."

"Why, to be sure," said Gara; then on tiptoe, knees bent and stooped a little, his slouched hat held in both hands before him and his red head wagging as he stepped, went towards the door; and I following after could but smile and think, *A little child shall lead them.*

Afterwards on my way back to Emo, the men roistering behind (for they too had entered the terrace windows) and the laden carts clattering after, I pondered much over the significance of that scene in the blue drawing-room. Sentiment apart, consideration of it brought vividly home to me the completeness and greatness of the blow that had fallen on Ireland. The Dunskees, herded there in the midst of their luxury, proud owners once of great estates, great in name, power, lineage; they represented the old order, stood for a conquering nation that never would stoop to conquer and an ascendant class that, spite of a hundred warnings, a thousand chances, had through long centuries spurned pridefully those whom they might have led: whilst Gara, he the uncouth savage of the hills, fierce, pitiless, all the best of him covered deep with smouldering, nay flaming, fires of hatred and rebellion; Gara stood for the new order, for all the ten thousands who, dowered by the pitiless centuries, now everywhere from shore to shore of Ireland were trampling blind ascendancy and predominance into the clay. How blind they

had been, these conquering Saxons, scornful of a race they could not understand, distrustful of a people they would not know, governing by force, legislating by compulsion ; how purblind had been these tyrannising classes, so careless of duty, heedless of warning, so confident in their seats of the mighty ! Buffoons, blackguards, savages, thieves and liars, law-breakers, heretics : what more than these had Englishmen, excepting always a kindly remnant, ever in their hearts accounted the Irish Catholics ? Scum and pests of the earth, pig-breeders, spade-drivers, payers of rent : what sweeter names ever had the Dunskees and their kind for the people whom during a month in the year they patronised and endured ? They a nation, they have aspirations, they dare to assert themselves or rise against the might of Protestant England : *they*, why even the idea was absurd ! So, despite teachings and warnings, the rulers and governors had persisted in thinking ; had blundered and trifled, till at last the blow fell. And now the Dunskees were down, and the Garas were up. Can you say that the blow fell undeserved ? Can you pity the Dunskees ? Can you wonder at the Garas ?

Was the blow decisive ? Had I confidence in the Garas ; by whom I mean not only the petty leaders, the Dooleys and Muldoons and Morans, but also the people led ? Had I pity for the Dunskees and all their kind ? These questions I asked myself that night, as I rode between the hedges and past the silent hills (Lord, how lonely they stood under the solemn stars !), back towards Emo.

How answer myself with any certitude. The blow so far was decisive enough, but whether its effect

would remain, depended greatly, I thought, on the wisdom of the leaders who then were contriving in Dublin, not harmoniously as I judged from *The Republic*. Should these prove faithful and do wisely, it seemed that the flag might be firmly planted. What the people needed, and had always needed, was good leading. At present they were like children rioting in a playground, wild with access of freedom, foolish something, pitiless somewhat, the good in them mastered by the bad ; but presently, I thought, did the teachers know discipline, would come the hush of work and endeavour. Yes, the people had my confidence. Even Gara and Dooley, Muldoon and Moran, incompetent though they were and often foolish, had worthy qualities. But, as too often we find it when dealing with Irishmen, and with aspiring Irishmen in particular, their good qualities needed finding.

As for the Dunskees and their kind ; well, I confess that my pity for them was small. They had contrived their own fate ; all that Gara had said to my Lord in the blue drawing-room was nearly true, and to it might be added other truths. Still, even the Marquis had his good qualities. As a man he was brave and kindly ; as a landlord he had done no worse than uphold the traditions of his class. I pitied the man in him a little, the lord nothing ; just as I admired the woman in my Lady and wished she had played the woman sooner. For my notion is that even a republic has place for real nobility.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRIMROSE PATH

NEXT morning we carted a gun across Thrasna river, hauled it up the landward side of Bilboa hill, and behind a screen of hurdles fell to training it upon Rhamus.

It was an old rusty weapon, of a huge weight and villainous aspect, its calibre great and varying, its vent so worn that, as O'Hea expressed it, "only for the bit of a fuse divil knows that the ball wouldn't hit the sun." Also it had no carriage, its ammunition was common blasting powder (which we poured from a milking porringer), solid iron balls and miner's fuse; and we rammed with corn sacks and a four-inch fence stake.

Having raised a mound of earth, we laid upon it a platform of railway sleepers that sloped upwards and ended with a notched beam on its outer edge; then hoisted the gun, set it on end and loaded it; then lowered its muzzle into the notch and by means of wedges gave it a problematic elevation; then placed beams on either side and behind the breach ("to keep the bitch from kickin'," said O'Hea), and primed with eighteen inches of fuse. I admit that when all was ready I smiled at the result of our labours. It recalled my school days or something I had read in

history: that device, for example, of the tin cannon bound with cord and buckram that was employed so absurdly against the heroic defenders of the first Louth castle. However, smiling proved little; so, having made a gap in the hurdles, I put a match to the fuse and ran.

Fifty yards or more from the gun I flung myself upon the hillside, and with my eyes on Rhamus lay waiting for what might happen. Behind me at a safer distance (for, as Phil Dandy said, "the further ye got from the kick of a mule the better,") the men crouched at back of a ditch, their faces peeping solemnly between the whitethorns. A great silence held Bilboa, broken only by the wailing of peewits over Thrasna river and the spitting of the fuse. Had you lain beside me that morning, you might I think have formed an idea of the duration of eternity.

Of a sudden she spoke, with a sky-rending bang and a belch of smoke and flame. The solid earth trembled. The sky was obscured. The men, finding the world still intact, rose up and cheered. On hands and knees I stayed peering towards Rhamus, my throat full of powder reek. From hill to hill the report went echoing and died away. Slowly the smoke drifted along the hedges; lifted of a sudden and gave me view of Rhamus castle still there upon its hilltop, grim, unscathed, the Protestants swarming upon its walls. So. Well, at least we had made a noise in the world.

Like boys out of school the men came running, all excited and babbling. "Man, the bang it was," said one; "sure it's meself thought 'twas judgment day." "Lord, the way she jumped," shouted another, "just like a rabbit when it's shot." "An' the blaze of her,"

cried another, "like thunder an' lightnin' all in one. Man, man, the sight it was." "Where did it go to, captain?" asked O'Hea, and stepped to my side, a hand stroking his lip. "Did ye see iver a sight of it, now?"

I stood looking at the gun as it lay on the grass, its muzzle pointing towards Rhamus, every protecting beam scattered wide around it. "Not a sight I saw, Dan. Did you?"

"Well, the devil a one then," answered Dan. "Arrah, how could I an' me blind with the noise? But sure it must have hit *somewhere*, captain; it surely must."

"It surely must, Dan," said I with a laugh; "if 'twas only a townland it surely hit something. Anyway, Rhamus is still there."

"Ah, faith it is," answered Dan. "I wonder now if *they* seen it? But look." A spirt of smoke streaked with flame shot from one of the turrets, and over the hurdles a bullet came singing.

I had small mind to train Maria (so O'Hea christened the gun, after Moran's mule) for a second shot; but the men pleaded so eagerly for another bang that, as reward for their labours, I had to oblige them. To the music, then, of an occasional bullet from Rhamus walls, we dragged Maria back to the platform and set her on end, poured in a gallon of powder (with an extra handful for luck) and rammed tight with half a sack, drove home the ball till the rammer rang, laid her muzzle in the notch and sighted her sure; then piled beams and stones round flanks and breach, lighted the fuse, and ran once more.

The men fled to their old shelter; but O'Hea and

I went downhill a little way and crouched in a ditch to windward of the hurdles. We saw the Protestants disappear behind the walls. Distinctly we could hear the fuse spluttering in Maria. O'Hea hunkered low and trembled like a wet spaniel. When the bang came at last he leaped high and shouted, "Watch it, captain. Keep an eye on it, for God's sake." But all our watching was in vain. The echoes died away. The smoke cleared. The men came shouting down. And there before us Rhamus hill stood unshaken, with the castle still frowning upon it and the Protestants cheering scornfully on the walls. "Lord, the almighty bang it was," shouted the men behind us. "Dang me, if it wasn't fit to burst the world." "Did ye see it, captain?" said O'Hea. "Had ye iver a sight of it?" "Not one, Dan," answered I. "I'm thinking we've hit another townland."

"Well, divil cares," said Dan. "They heard us anyway; an' sure it's the height of good fun."

To please the men, I let Maria have three more chances at Rhamus, once to the right, and once to the left (it being the brilliant idea of someone — Phil Dandy, I think—that she had a squint in her eye), and again point blank with a charge and a half of powder in her wame. But for all our humouring Maria refused to see the castle; and at the third attempt, with a hideous belch she burst her heart and scattered herself about the hillside.

That tragi-comedy over, we strengthened the cordon round Rhamus and left hunger to do its work (and ours) with the garrison. What other might we at present do? Why throw away good lives in attempting to free a handful of fanatics from all the horrors of

their state : cold and heat, rain and drought, starvation, fever, fear of death and loathing of miserable life? If, for mere conscience sake, they preferred these things to the comfort of Bunn town-hall with an airing every day on the fair-green, why that was their affair. We could afford to wait. We had only to sit patiently in comfort and let nature work the inevitable. Meanwhile, let Moran and his sharpshooters practise at the loopholes from Bilboa or the ditches of Emo ; let the posts be vigilant and once a week wake the Master from his troubled sleep ; let us just trust to time, and some day, maybe, with the aid of Gara and Michael Dooley . . . "Ach, some day," growled Moran ; "some day the sky'll fall."

We smiled at the fox and resumed our pastoral ways, there in our hillside nest. Why worry, thought we, and waste good time in pining? Why not stay always just so ; the sky blue above us, soft winds blowing from the mountain, and the earth beautiful under our feet? Such an air it was that breathed round our nest, slumbrous and sooth, giving long sleep and pleasant dreams. Elsewhere in Ulster might be tribulation, Belfast and Londonderry and Enniskillen still running blood, the hillsides far and near still soaking ; with us was peace. What if famine was lurking in the orchards of Gorteen? What though food was getting scarce in Armoy and at famine prices in Bunn ; what though those laden ships from America were slow in coming? Be it that the leaders, as said *The Republic*, were wrangling in Dublin over ways and means ; that only a form of government, provisional and highly experimental, had yet been established ; that even with Michael Dooley as our representative,

elected or selected or I know not what, in the National Assembly, no groping hand had yet reached out to us with gifts of law and order ; that everywhere, to all seeming, everyone was blissfully governing himself, dividing the spoil or preparing to divide. "To the devil with government," said we, Phil Dandy serving as spokesman one night as Christy sat reading. "Why can't they leave us alone? Aren't we well able to govern ourselves?" And though Christy, and maybe oneself, dissented, the kitchen applauded Phil. Government, indeed, and we so contented as we were! Food of a kind was not lacking, work was light, diversion constant. In the yard pooten ran freely from Moran's private still. The parlour rang often with careless laughter, and at night we gambled for half-pence like belted earls. Well, and were we not wise? Would worrying stave off trouble? Would fretting avert the gaunt face of famine? What cared we if the Leaders were wrangling ; what to us were the women of Gorteen? Let the piper tune : lead off the dance : and let the devil pay.

These worthless fools of Irishry, you say. Well, maybe so. I make no excuses ; not even for that sapient one, the man who deliberately made for himself a Fool's paradise and dwelt there in the sunshine of a woman's smile. Poor simpleton of a man, so blind, so full of rosy dreams. You thought she had forgotten!

One afternoon as I stood leaning on the gate, my eyes glorifying the mountain with idle dreams, Christy came strutting down the avenue and stopped beside me. "It's grand weather, Shaw," said he rapping his pipe upon the gate post.

"The best," answered I, shortly enough, for I liked my dreams.

"Ay, it is. I can't mind better in me time. Sure it makes one glad to be alive. Ah, it's a lovely country," sighed Muldoon, then turned his back to the gate and stood eyeing Emo; "an' sure it's a beautiful place. None better is there in these parts. He'll be lucky that gets it. He will so." For a minute he stood silent, his eyes doubtless on the primrose path; suddenly turned again. "Shaw, I've a favour to ask of ye."

My dreams had gone. Fretfully I set my back to the gate. "Yes, and what's your favour, Adjutant?"

"Well, it's this, Shaw. I'm wishful to make a bit of a journey, an' I want your leave."

"Oh. Are you thinking of going far?"

"Well, I am," answered Christy. "It's a matter of business, Shaw. I'm wishful to spend a day or two in headquarters."

"But you're there, Adjutant."

"Ah, I know. You're mistakin' me, Shaw. I mean Dublin."

I glanced round at the Adjutant and read his purpose in his scheming face. In Dublin, thought he, would the spoil be divided; there would blossom his primrose path. I fancied him pleading his case, magnifying his services and claiming his reward, in some crowded audience chamber; and my smile was scornful. "But I hear, Adjutant," mocked I, "that the post of Commander-in-Chief is filled."

He looked at me. "You're playin' with me, Shaw. You're sneerin' at me." He faced me and spraddled wide on the avenue, head lowered and thumbs hooked

in the armholes of his waistcoat. "Ay, you're sneerin' at me," said the Adjutant, his little eyes glowering. "You're always at that game, Shaw. Ye think, I suppose, because you've captain to your name that ye can wipe your Protestant feet on me. Yis. It's not enough that ye force me to eat at the same table with them that ought to be in gaol, but ye must make me a laughin' stock for them day an' night. Yis. If I'm not a coward then ye find me a fool, an' if that fails ye why I'm a hillside bosthoon. Aw, to be sure. Because for sake of me country I pocketed me feelin's an' submitted to your impidence, ye imagined I had no feelin's and no more pluck than a crawlin' worm. Ay, you're laughin' again," said Christy, and clenched his hands, and pushed nearer his ruffian face. "You're thinkin' that worm describes me. Am I, then? An' what are you, Jamie Shaw? What were ye a while ago before I gave ye a lift? What'll ye be in a few days when—when——" Christy stopped and looked past me towards the mountain; but very gently I gave him the spur.

"Go on, Adjutant," said I. "Confession's part of your creed. You'd be saying, I think, that in a few days you'll have chance to give me a fall. Is that it?"

"I never said it," answered Christy.

"But you nearly did. Is it for that you're going to headquarters, Adjutant?"

"Naw, it's not," said he. "For all your cleverness you're out this time."

"Yes, but not far, Adjutant. We'll say you could make it part of your business. Or, to put it another way, we'll say that when you've got Emo as reward

for your valiant services, you'll see no harm in clearing me out of it. Eh, my feather-bed Adjutant?"

He stood glowering at me, writhing under the lash; suddenly came at me with a rush. "By God," he roared, "I'll have your blood. I'll have——"

He said no more; for stepping quickly aside, I hit him full on the jaw and sent him crashing into the whitethorn hedge. "There's good-bye to you, Adjutant," said I across my shoulder. "If you'll wait there a minute I'll send out your coat."

Ten minutes afterwards, Christy, having poured out his profane soul upon my head, went down the road under escort, and we saw him no more. What he did in Dublin I know not. Perhaps my official letter of recommendation helped him to do little.

I made Slane Quartermaster and promoted Moran to Christy's place; but within two days Slane was Adjutant and O'Hea had stepped into his empty shoes.

It was in the parlour, John having gone to bed and Sheehan driven off in his rumbling gig, that Moran tendered his resignation. With him was no beating about the bush, but a straight plunge into its midst.

"I'm goin', Shaw," said he. "You'll fill me place in the mornin'."

I was not surprised at Moran's word, for of late he had been very restless. "That's bad news, Patrick. May I ask your reasons?"

"I'd liefer ye didn't, Shaw. Mebbe you'd hear little that'd please ye."

"Then I do ask, Patrick."

"Ay. Well, it's just this," said Moran, and leant forward in his chair, elbows on knees and a hand plucking at his red whiskers. "I'm sick to the heart

of the way things are goin' here. You'd think to see everyone that 'twas out on a picnic we were, with nothin' to do but eat an' drink an' divert ourselves. Look at the men, look at yourself, look at the headway we've made durin' this last fortnight. I ax ye plain, Shaw," said Moran, twisting round his face, "is it to fill their bellies an' play cards all day that the men are here? An' is deluderin' yourself with women what you call your duty?"

"No, Moran," answered I. "But leaving the women out of the question, maybe before you go you'd tell me my duty?"

"It's there," said he with a jerk of his thumb towards Rhamus.

"Yes. And what I'm already doing there is useless, you think?"

"It's just foolery, Shaw. It makes me think of spittin' at the sun to put it out."

"I know. You'd bang them, Moran, if you were I?"

"Ah, by God, I would! Day an' night—day an' night."

"I see. And because of this and everything else, you'd say I was neglecting my duty?"

"I'm sure of it. God alive, man, don't ye know it yourself? Look at ye goin' about day after day like a suckin' calf, dreamin' an' mopin', cluckin' after a petticoat like a hungry hen. Is that your duty? Is that what we made ye captain for an' followed ye well? Is that what Ireland expects of ye, an' is that your notion of servin' her?"

"No, Moran," answered I. "But go on, like a man. I want to hear everything."

"Ach, if I said everything, be the Lord I'd talk till

cock-crow. What's the good of talkin' ? What have we done but talk for the last fortnight ? Talk, talk, like danged women in a fair ! I'm sick of it, I tell ye. Follow your devil's devices in your own way, but I'm quit of them from this night. I'm tired of ye, Shaw ; an' God knows but I'm disappointed. At first ye did well. Me hopes were big for ye. Says I, ' Here's the boy for us an' Ireland.' An' then, just in the middle of it all, that baggage bewitched ye, an' all was done. May the devil take her——"

This was more than my patience could bear. Leaning over I tapped Moran's knee. " Easy, Patrick," said I. " Say what you like about myself, but if you value your skin leave the baggage alone."

" She is a baggage," snapped the fox, " an' for what she's done to ye she has my curse. Only for her, I say, you'd have played the man. It's because of her you've played the sheep. I don't care a snap o' me thumb for your threats, Shaw, an' I care less for yourself this minute. Ye asked me to speak an' I'm speakin'. Rouse me more an' I'll call ye a traitor. Ah, to glory with ye," shouted Moran, rising and flinging out his hands. " Follow your devices, but I'm quit of ye."

With that he would have gone ; but passing me on his way to the door I took him by the arm. " Patrick," said I, " this is a poor way for us to part. Come, haven't you a better parting word for me than traitor ? " He stood looking down at me, his yellow fangs bared, his long narrow face wrinkled and puckered round his beady eyes and long drooping nose ; stood for half a minute, then blinked and grinned. " Ye didn't rouse me," said he, " so I didn't say it."

"And you'll not say it, Patrick, for sake of the time we rode together when the moon was full."

He looked at me another half minute, and the grin widened across his wrinkles. "You're a strange man, Shaw. I misdoubt if I ever seen your like. There's a power of good in ye an' there's a power——"

"Of bad, Patrick?"

He stood considering. "Naw, it's not bad; it's just contrariness an' strangeness. There's two people inside your tunic, Shaw—yourself that can play the man wi' men, an' someone else that turns yourself into a jelly-bag at sight of a petticoat. An' even in yourself there's trifles o' faults. Ay. Ye baulk at the jump. Ye keep your eye too long on the bobbin' cork an' when ye pull the fish is gone. You'd make a good parson, but for a fightin' man you're too cautious on the stroke. An' it's a pity," mused Moran, a hand stroking his chin and his eyes on the lamp. "For I'd follow ye in your right mind to Kingdom come, an' you've courage enough, an' you've gifts o' your own. But sure— Ah, I'll admit to ye that it's a struggle to go."

"But you will go, Patrick?"

"Surely. I'm of no manner o' use here. If I stayed I'd only be insultin' you an' makin' a fool o' meself. Mebbe it's murder I'd be doin' on Hynes. . . . No matter. It's nothin' to me now."

"But where are you going, Patrick?"

"Ah, divil knows. I'll go home for a day; then maybe I'll go down to Enniskillen, or maybe slip up to Belfast or Derry—anywhere to find sport."

I rose and put out my hand. "Well, Patrick, if you must go, you must. But maybe one of these

days you'll hear of sport in Emo again, and then you'll be slipping back to us."

"Ay. God only knows. Good-bye to ye, captain, an'—an'—Well, 'twas your own wish to hear me."

"It was, Patrick. Good-bye, lad. And remember me in your prayers."

He went out slowly, almost reluctantly. Had I called him, I think he would have stayed. But I did not call. Next morning he was gone, and I never saw him again. Afterwards I read his name in a list of those who fell at the last great attack on the walls of Derry. Poor Moran. I have met worse men, few better soldiers.

So did it come about that only John and Susan and Leah (for Sheehan, you must know, was no longer in residence, and O'Hea preferred to mess with the men) were left to keep me company in the parlour. Every morning we met at breakfast and sometimes were merry together, sometimes dull. Throughout the day we saw more or less of each other, John maybe spending a while at home, Susan being busy always, Leah having plenty to do in the barn, I going my eternal round from Stonegate to the River house, or riding for news to Bunn, or visiting the cottages throughout Armoy. In the evenings we met again, talked a while, discussed the news, said good-night and went to bed. They were pleasant days. I recall them with pleasure. John and Susan did their best to entertain me and showed me much favour; the favour, I sometimes have thought, they would gladly have extended to a son. But they never expressed their feelings; nor did Leah ever . . .

Gradually it was coming clear to me that never

in life would Leah believe that the same God had made me and Jan Farmer. Upon me she might smile and look kindly: yes, but only with her eyes. To me she might speak softly: yes, but never from her heart. She had not forgotten. She bore with me for sake of peace, was kind because she would be grateful. I began to have suspicion that her smiles were false, that her graciousness was mere pretence. I found myself watching her furtively, and when I came upon her looking across the valley through the parlour window or from the barn doorway, I said to myself, "Her eyes are on Rhamus, Jamie Shaw, and her heart is in her eyes. She is playing with you in her sleek woman's way. Have done with it, Shaw. Get back to duty and scatter your dreams."

Yet scatter as I might, never could I keep my dreams from gathering again. Whole hours I might play the man in full daylight; but surely as I entered the parlour of an evening and saw Leah there, head bent over her needle, the lamplight soft on her cheek and glowing on her hair, even as she looked round and spoke a word of greeting, my blood ran fire again and I sat enslaved. There were times when the impulse to snatch her to me in mad recklessness of passion was almost resistless. I have stood trembling in the barn beside her, my heart crying, "Leah, Leah, for God's sake come to me." I have gone striding up the lawn, my eyes hot on the lighted window, my heart saying, "She must—she must—she must. To-night I'll speak surely."

And I never spoke, never took her in my arms. I dared not. I knew she would silence me with a look, just kill my passion with a frigid word. She only endured me. Inwardly she despised and scorned me.

Our talk was always of the same things—the same miserable trifles—with never an intimate word, never an unguarded look. Did my voice soften she spoke of the weather ; did I lean towards her she rose and moved away. Yet, knowing all, and in spite of all, I dreamt.

One afternoon, as I was starting for Stonegate, I happened to look round and saw Leah sitting on the front doorstep. Her head was bare ; her knees were up-gathered, elbows resting upon them and face in her hands. She wore a blue cotton dress with linen collar and cuffs, and on her breast was a big red rose. Motionless she sat in the sunshine and brooded ; her eyes looking across the valley towards Emo. Of what was she thinking ? What message was she sending over to Jan ?

In a while I stepped softly across the gravel, came to her side and stood looking down upon her. She did not stir. Maybe she had not heard me ; perhaps she was ignoring me. "It's a fine view, Miss Hynes," said I at last. "You seem fond of it ?"

She dropped her hands and looked up, calmly enough but without answering. Her eyes were soft and on her face was a strange look ; the look, I have thought, of a child wakened from its dreams. Why were her eyes soft ? Why did they harden at sight of me ? "You seem fond of it, Miss Hynes," I repeated, with some harshness.

She rose from the step and stood looking at Rhamus, head erect and hands clasped behind her. "Yes," said she, with a quiet smile. "I am fond of it."

"And why, may I ask ?"

"Oh, for nothin'," came back, softly, a little wearily. "I can't tell why."

"You mean you won't." She did not answer. "But surely," I went on, "your choice is not happy. What is there before us to make anyone fond? A green lawn, a stretch of heather and willow clumps, rushy fields within whitethorn hedges, a little plantation on the hillside, and beyond an old ruin frowning against the sky. Come, Miss Hynes, acknowledge that your choice is poor. Admit that around us are twenty views that excel it."

"Yes," answered Leah. "Maybe so."

"Perhaps you see more in it, Miss Hynes, than I can?"

A flush ran upon her cheek, round her eyes a smile flickered. She stood still and did not answer.

"Perhaps the valley has beauties that to me are hid?" Still no word. "Perhaps it's Rhamus, then?"

My taunts did not move her. Silently, a foot tapping on the gravel, head erect, and hands behind her, she stood before the step, that quiet smile answering me and her eyes always on the ivied walls. Always there, day and night always there! And seeing her; in sight of her also as she had been for many a day, repulsing me ever with mockery of smile and word; sudden bitterness of spirit filled me and desire to master her pride. "Well then," I said, "since you won't answer—let me beg the favour of your company whilst I make my rounds. A walk will do you good, Miss Hynes. Perhaps on the way we shall be able to explore the beauties of your valley." She turned and looked at me, her eyes keen with suspicion. I drew back and motioned towards the door. "Come, I give

you five minutes to get ready." She did not move. "Do you hear me?" said I, stepping quickly towards her. And with that Leah went into the hall and up the stairs.

She came back soon ; in black, now, with straw hat and white cotton gloves. Her face was pale and set (had it ever smiled, ever made me think of autumn apples?) and she kept it from me. Together, yet far apart, we went through the wicket gate and down across the lawn into the valley. A glorious June afternoon it was, full of mellowness and peace. The sky was deep and soft. The wind was like wool upon our faces—our joyless faces.

"What beautiful weather," said I in a while.

"Yes," she answered.

"The valley lies smiling before you," said I. "Look. Do you still find it beautiful?"

"Yes," answered Leah, without pausing or looking. "I do."

Side by side, yet farther apart than the hedges, we went through a gateway out upon the road, and up towards Stonegate. The mossy ditches were thick with ferns, forget-me-nots and wild strawberry plants, with trailing ivy and wild rose trees, with blackberry bramble and boor trees here and there among the whitethorns. I picked a forget-me-not and held it towards Leah. She glanced at it; moved from me and went calmly on, straight uphill between the narrow hedges. Gradually I edged towards her, as gradually she moved from me, till presently we walked close together upon her side of the way. Then I raised the forget-me-not. "Don't you think it a pretty flower?" I asked.

"I do," answered Leah.

"Lovers are fond of it, they say."

"Are they?" said Leah.

"Yes. I've heard so. You see it grows plentifully in your valley. Do you think," said I with my eyes on her face, "it flourishes on barren Rhamus?"

"Maybe," said Leah. "I was never there so I don't know."

"Ah. But that is strange, Miss Hynes. I thought all you country-side lovers paid Rhamus a visit. Come, admit to me that a friend of ours has taken you there?"

She turned round, a flush deep on her face. "My friends are not yours, thank God," she said.

"No? And the same God never made us. Isn't that so?"

"It is so," said Leah; and with the answer I edged from her towards my own side of the road.

We came to Stonegate, and whilst I visited the post in Graham's house Leah waited for me in the front garden. When I came out she was standing by a rose tree, her head bent and a rose between her fingers.

"You're fond of roses, Miss Leah," said I. "Well, we have one taste in common."

"Have we?" she answered; then, by way of retort, let the rose slip from her fingers, and went out through the gateway.

Together, yet with more than the width of the road between us, we went down towards the River house, Leah walking in shadow of the hedge, I keeping to the middle of the road. How often before, and in what varying moods, I had gone down that dusty

highway, Leah keeping me shadowy company how often between the lonesome hedges; and now Leah herself was with me, and what a mood was mine. In silence we walked and far apart. Sometimes I looked at her, fighting the devil that drove me and longing for her face; but she kept her face away.

Presently we came to a gateway through which was full sight of Rhamus castle set upon its hill; and there I stopped.

"Here's the lovers' nest," said I, and leaving the road leant upon the gate. "Let us rest a minute and look at it." Leah came over, laid a hand upon the rail and stood looking. I watched her narrowly. Only a slight quickening of the breath betrayed her. Surely she was tempered well.

"It's a grim old place," mused I in a while, my face towards Rhamus, my eyes on Leah. "Every stone of it is written with history. For nearly four hundred years it has stood there, frowning down upon the hungry generations. Think of what it has seen, imagine the story it could tell. Men have died unhappily within its walls, children wept and played, women moaned and rejoiced. . . . Now only the bats enliven its gloom, and country-side lovers whisper in its ruin. Bats and lovers? Why, to be sure," said I with a laugh. "Blind things all of them."

Leah did not heed me. She stood like one in a trance. Presently someone moved on Rhamus walls, rose up and stood out against the sky. He was tall and shapely. One arm was crooked, the other raised to his face. Presently he took off his cap and waved it; and in answer Leah just raised her hand, dropped it quick and looked at me. And the look was enough.

"Oho," said I. "What's this?" Quickly I went to Leah's side. "Come. What's the meaning of this?" I caught her arm. "Answer me," I commanded. "Was he signalling to you?"

For answer Leah tried to move away, and her lips quivered.

"He was signalling, then? And you know him? And you've been meeting him—seeing him? Answer me," I commanded.

But Leah would not, or could not, answer; only stood beside me, pulling from my hand with her eyes on the grass.

"You traitress," said I. "This is how you've repaid my services. This explains your false smiles. Who told you?" I shouted.

"I—I guessed," said Leah.

"Was it Sheehan?"

"No—no," said Leah. "Not till I—not till I begged of him."

"Yes. You begged! You played with him as you've played with me. How often have you seen him?"

"Only—only twice," faltered Leah.

"Only twice. . . . How did you see him?" I clamoured.

"He came an' called me in the night."

Came and called her in the night. Great heavens. I took my hand from her arm, stood back and tried to think. Blind? Lord, how blind I had been! Deluded? Ah, how measure the greatness of my delusion! *Came and called her in the night.* Yes; came that night when the rifles woke me and I stood blind upon the landing. "And you told him every-

thing," cried I. "You played the traitor and told him everything?"

"I told him nothin'," said Leah raising her head; "for he never asked me."

That was true. I read it in her eyes. "No," cried the devil in me; "but you told him how you were befooling me."

"Not even that did I say," answered Leah; "for there was no need."

Well, perhaps that was true also, and the answer was deserved. I drew back a step and across the gate stood looking at the figure of my enemy, rigid there against the blue high up on Rhamus wall. A fine triumph this was for him. A pretty mess I had made of everything. . . .

He came and called her in the night—came whilst I was dreaming. The thought maddened me. I had the impulse to stamp and rage and blaspheme. If only I had a rifle. Could I but lure him down and get my fingers at his throat. . . .

Think of Jan daring to call, of Leah daring to answer. What had they said about me? What was he saying now? I imagined all the Protestants grinning through the loopholes, the Master smiling among them and Jan triumphing on the wall. "Poor fool of a pig-drover," they were saying; "see him down yonder gaping like an ass over a gate."

Was I, by God! Oh, I'd show them even yet. From this day there would be no more fooling round Rhamus, but banging enough to satisfy Moran's self. I'd have Jan yet by the neck. I'd have Leah craving for mercy at my feet. See her standing there, so meek and simple. See him daring up there in his insolence.

Then of a sudden my humour changed, and sweeping off my hat I bowed mockingly to Leah. "Madam," said I, "forgive my seeming neglect. I was lost in admiration of the game. But come," said I, swinging open the gate and motioning her through. "Let us view the lovers' nest at closer quarters. Come," said I; and with her eyes wide upon me Leah passed through the gateway.

Side by side we went half way up the hill, then turned and walked across it; came to a hedge and turned again and walked across the hill to another hedge; there turned once more and walked back. We spoke no word. Leah kept her face to the grass, hands clenched by her sides and her lips compressed. Head erect, shoulders back, and thumbs caught in my belt, carelessly I strutted beside her, humming a tune and with my eyes on Rhamus. I saw faces above the wall and at the loopholes. Now and then I caught the glitter of a rifle barrel among the ivy. I was glad to see the faces, knowing that Jan's was scowling among them; I cared nothing for the threatening rifles. Even at three hundred yards, you will understand, it is possible for a bullet to find the wrong billet; and only fools challenge a cordon by daylight.

Twice we walked across the hill and twice walked back; then, being opposite Rhamus again, I stopped and, with Leah close beside me, stood facing it. Now was a good time to shoot: but I knew that Jan dared not.

"Well, Miss Leah," said I; "what do you think now of your lover's nest? It looks a gloomy place, doesn't it? It's not exactly the spot, is it, where

forget-me-nots would flourish? You wouldn't care, would you, to spend three weeks or a month imprisoned there on bread and water, with the sky for a roof and the clay for a bed?"

My taunts were devilish, you say. Yes, yes. I have never tried to forgive myself for them; but imagine what thoughts I had, and let me say that Leah took them bravely. Turning, her face aflame, "Ah, but I would care," she said. "I'd just give my life to be in it."

"Yes?" said I, not angry now but full of bitterness. "Is it because *he* is there?"

"It is," answered Leah.

"I know. So your fancy for him is just the same?"

"The same," cried Leah. "No, but ten thousand times more."

I stood looking at her in something like wonder. Never even in my dreams had I seen her so beautiful; not till that moment did I realise that she was a girl no longer but woman grown, changed and sobered in a few dark weeks, matured through pain and suffering. And, ah, the pain I had at thought that not for me, never though life were eternity long, was her bounty of worth and beauty.

"And for me, too," said I, "your feeling has not changed? You still think of me as a butcher, still think that the same God never made me and him?"

Her eyes met mine, and fell slowly. Her hands joined and twined. "Ah," she said, "sure I'm very thankful for what you've done for us all. I wish—I wish——"

She broke off there and I did not press her to say what she wished. Doubtless it was something

in the way of gratitude, something I did not want. "Yes," I said; "but your feelings, your heart, has not changed? I'm nothing in the world to you?"

"Nothin'," said Leah; "nothin' at all."

"And Jan is everything, is all your world?"

"He's everything," answered Leah; "ah, more than everything—God help him."

"Yes, God help him," said I with a bitter laugh. "He's much to be pitied. And this minute, if I gave you the chance, you'd go I suppose and share his bread and water?"

She looked at me quickly, her face lit gloriously; turned and with hands clasped before her stood looking at Rhamus wall. "Ah," she sighed in long rapture, as might one in sight of Heaven's gate.

What could I say or do? It was as though the hillside in a moment had been transformed into an inner shrine, hallowed in the temple of the sky. I stood rapt before the wonder of Leah's face, filled with the low sound of her rapture; carried out of my little self away from my little world.

But the temple vanished soon, and waking I thought: Why not end all here and now; just raise my hat, and say good-bye, and watch Leah go into her heaven? Then all would be over indeed, dreams and doubts, tortures, raptures; then were I free again for work and duty; then at last might she have proof that in me was some good. Should I? Could I? Even now could I bear to lose her?

I looked at Rhamus, and sight of it decided me. Jan was there. It was to him she would go, him my enemy. No, by the Lord; not till the last minute of the appointed time should he take her from me!

"Well, I'm sorry, Miss Leah," said I; "but you must wait a little longer. Rhamus is no place for you. At present you'll be better in my care. Come. It's time to be going."

So together, yet with all the world between us, we went down to the road and back by way of Stonegate to Emo. And all the way we spoke no word.

That night I called in all the men from furlough and closed Rhamus in with a ring impenetrable. Next day I went to see Phil Gara and Michael Dooley, and persuaded them to promise me help in a combined attack on the castle, during the following Sunday night. Two days afterwards, as I lay maturing my plans in the oak plantation, six Protestants with Jan Farmer as leader rushed suddenly upon me out of the hazel scrub, overpowered and bound me, and hurried me up towards Rhamus castle.

CHAPTER XIV

LIFE OR DEATH

UP through the rushes we went across the Orchard. From Emo valley and the hedges round Stonegate a few wild shots were fired. Among the carts stood a crowd of Protestants who cheered and waved their hats at sight of us. Near the trench Jan blindfolded me with a handkerchief; then led me over the plank and in across the Paddock through the carts. Around us the Protestants swarmed thick, cheering and shouting, the odour of them not pleasant. "Good man, Jan," went the voices; "you've got the croppy at last. . . . Good for you, boys; well done, me sons. . . . Back there, an' let the rebel past. . . . Hell's waitin' for ye now, Black Shaw."

Had the rabble got their way I think they might have rent me; but Jan and the Master ordered them off, and presently I found myself standing dark and bound with my back to a wall. The rope hurt my wrists, my eyes ached under the handkerchief. Cold sweat trickled down my forehead; I found it hard to breathe, and my knees were feeble. What will they do? I asked myself, striving the while for calmness and courage.

For a time I stood in silence; then before me voices rose in the darkness, this one clashing with

that in eager discussion. I knew that somewhere in sight of me, somewhere in the blackness, they were deciding my fate, and with bated breath I listened ; but only an occasional word came clearly. "He's a rebel," said one. "What mercy has he shown to us?" asked another. "I say give the devil his due," said one. "My vote's for hangin' the fox," said another. Then the Master said something which I could not hear, and quick Jan's voice came angrily. "But he's my prisoner, I say. . . . We have right, I tell ye. . . . What would he do to yourself if he caught ye. . . . Ah, right be danged ! Why, to hear ye, one'd think 'twas we were the rebels. . . . No, I wouldn't shoot him, but I'd——" What Jan would do to me I failed to hear ; but judging by the applause he got I felt sure that it was something worthy.

After that the Master spoke again, his words broken now and again by exclamations of dissent or half-hearted approval ; then of a sudden his voice stopped, and in a minute came quick from the darkness—came sudden and swift at my face and drove me breathless against the wall.

"Well, Shaw," said the Master, "so we meet again. It's a sad mistake you've made this time, my man."

I could answer nothing.

"We've been considering what to do with you," the Master continued ; "but before deciding we think it fair to hear what you can say for yourself. Is there anything?" he asked ; and getting no answer, "I suppose you hear me?" said he.

"Yes, I hear you. But it's dark," said I. "What can a man say for himself with no light in his eyes?"

"Hum," grunted the Master ; then kept quiet a minute

(pondering I suppose); then came over and took the handkerchief from my eyes. "Now you've light," said he, "if that's any use to you."

When my eyes had got used to the light, I found that my place was against the west wall, between two embrasures that looked down upon the Bunn road. On my right was the river wall, matted close with writhing ivy stems; at either end of it a turret entrance, in it two loopholes, and a narrow breach through which Jan Farmer stood looking towards Bilboa, his legs crossed and arms resting on the stones. Facing me, beyond the courtyard, was the wall that commanded Emo valley; and by this, under a pent roof of rushes and straw, sat three or four women and a few children—Mrs Farmer among them, sitting on a stool with hands folded on her lap. On my left two ditches covered with whitethorn scrub ran inwards along the courtyard's northern side, and ended at a wide opening (once the castle gateway I suppose) through which I had sight of the Protestants clustered in the Paddock, or squatted among the carts in silent contemplation. The courtyard itself was large, say fifty feet long by forty wide, and lay open to the sky, its edges still covered with fine grass, its middle trampled bare as a road and littered with stools, chairs, pots and pans, saddles and bridles, peat, bramble, straw and hay in bundles, sacks standing in the corners, rifles leaning against the wall, and here and there a rough bench strewn with tin basins and do? I kery ware. Along the ditches four goats and two and cowwere tethered. Across a corner stretched a rope For a ith various garments. Before the lean-to was voices rose stones, in it a smouldering fire, over it a pot

and kettle, and in the ashes a large brown tea-pot. Near the fire, on stools and up-turned tubs, sat five men, unwashed, mud-stained, with hollow cheeks and hungry eyes. The women also looked haggard and weary, but their eyes I thought held pity for me. Jan's face I could not see. Back from me a little way, leaning against a bench, with his feet crossed and arms folded, was the Master; and he also looked worn and weather-beaten, unkempt, unshaven, hair long and matted, his bushy eyebrows hanging fierce above his keen grey eyes. Once he had impressed me as being a man whom death itself could not master; now his hollow face and shrunken form showed clear signs of mortality. Yet his eyes were still indomitably patient, still quick with his old vigour and strength.

All this, you will understand, I saw little by little in odd intervals of our talk, the while I stood bound by the wrists against the wall.

"Well," said the Master from his place by the bench; "is there anything you can say for yourself?"

"Nothing you would care to hear."

"I know. Is there anything, then, you might like to say against yourself?"

"Nothing," I answered, my eyes on the five by the fire and on Jan by the wall, "that hasn't been said already."

"H'm." The Master's brows came down. "You've still got that tongue of yours."

"I have need, Mr Farmer. It's my only weapon."

"Ay, and the best you ever had." The Master pushed back his hat and settled himself firmly against the bench. "We've been thinking of shooting you,"

he said in his deliberate way. "Have you anything to say about that?"

"Only that I'm an officer of the Republic, Mr Farmer."

"Ha. Is that so? An officer of the Republic, you say?" The Master laid a finger on his lip and looked at me sideways. "What Republic?" said he. "Of Ireland," answered I.

"Oh, *that*," scoffed the Master. "I'd forgotten about it. I thought maybe something had happened to England. And who gave you your rank, Mr Shaw?"

"The Republic, Mr Farmer."

"To be sure, now. Why I thought it was Christy Muldoon." I scorned to answer that, all the more perhaps because Jan and the five by the fire were laughing, and the Master continued. "And is that the Republic's uniform you're wearing, Mr Shaw?" said he. "Whilst I wear it, Mr Farmer, it is."

"I see. And your notion is," quizzed the Master, "that if we shot you in it the Republic, as you call it, might take us to task?"

"That's my notion."

"I see. Well it's clear we'll have to be careful. But supposing for the sake of argument, Mr Shaw, that we shot you as a rebel wearin' the King's uniform, what might happen then?"

"You'd shoot no rebel, Mr Farmer," I answered boldly. "If you remember I made it clear to you, some time ago, who are rebels now in Ireland."

At that the five by the fire rose quickly and Jan wheeled round by the wall; but the Master just waved his hand and went on questioning. "You'd say that it is we who are rebels, Mr Shaw?"

"You force me to say it, Mr Farmer."

"And by saying it you think we're less likely to have your life?"

"I think nothing. I care nothing about my life. Take it or leave it just as you please."

Now was the time for the Master to do something melodramatic, to put my words to strong test before a row of levelled rifles ; but melodrama was not his way. Quietly he watched me from the bench, a forefinger tapping his lip, a mocking smile on his face. "Those are brave words, Shaw," said he. "I wonder who taught you the trick of them. Was it Micky Dooley, before he went to Dublin? Or was it Christy Muldoon, when he used to spout blood and thunder in Slane's schoolhouse?"

I could only stare at the man. How did he know that Dooley had gone to Dublin? Who told him about Christy's spouting in the schoolroom? What did he not know? What secret was not blown across these Irish hills?

"You look surprised," he went on with a scornful laugh. "Ay. Well, I could open your eyes wider, Shaw, if I had a mind. You and your—what's this Christy would call it?—ay, your cordon that a child could walk through. Man, you're a simple kind. What, in heaven's name, they're doing in Dublin that they don't make you Commander-in-Chief of the Republic is more than I can understand. . . . But no matter about that, Shaw. We were talking about your bit of a life that you say we may take or leave. I suppose now, for all your blether, you wouldn't be above keeping your life for a consideration?"

"I don't follow you, Mr Farmer," said I. "But you

will let me add this to my blethering, that my duty to the Republic is more to me than my life."

"Is it?" said the Master. "Well, so be it. We'll say, then, that what you call your duty might blink for a consideration."

"Still I don't follow you, Mr Farmer. What is this consideration?"

"Oh, we might bargain for your bit of a life, Shaw. We might come to some kind of terms."

What did the man mean? Was he mocking me? Was he speaking seriously, or only tempting me? "You're talking in riddles, Mr Farmer," I said. "You forget that my hands are tied."

"I forget nothing," he answered, "not even that your hands are tied. Is this plainer," asked he bending towards me. "Suppose, in return for your bit of a life, I gave you the chance to stop making a fool of yourself?"

"I'm darker than ever," was my answer. "What chance?"

"The chance to send your men home to mind the cows, and to stop us laughing at you and them."

So. Was this the Master's way of saying that he was beaten, that for a consideration he would make submission to the Republic? I set my face boldly. "You've had my terms, Mr Farmer," said I. "You said that you forgot nothing."

"I did," said he. "And I remember that I answered your terms. And I don't forget that now the boot's on the other foot, and that it's your turn to answer."

This of course was true. Surely a man with his wrists bound and his back to the wall, with foes around

him and loaded rifles waiting to put the question ; surely he has no choice but to answer. I glanced at the Protestants crowding in the gateway, at the five standing by the fire and Jan scowling by the breach ; at the Master leaning with folded arms against the bench, his eyes keen upon me and that slow smile mocking my helplessness. " Well," said I, " what are your terms ? "

" Just these : that you send your men home to their work and go yourself about your own business."

" Yes," I answered. " But that, in the circumstances, would be a one-sided arrangement. What about yourself and your men ? "

" Oh, myself and my men can look after ourselves. Surely," said the Master, " you've found that out before now ? "

I met his taunt boldly. " You mean," said I with my eyes on his, " that you are prepared to submit to the Republic ? "

I thought he would have leaped at me. His face surged red and his eyes blazed. He came towards me, his hands raised and clenched ; then stopped and fell to striding to and fro before me. By the wall Jan leant grinning. Round the fire the five stood gaping, the women motionless behind them and the Protestants crowding in the gateway. Up and down went the Master ; then faced me of a sudden. " Look here, my man," said he, " don't tempt me to lay hands on you ; for that would be worse, I tell you, than a rope round your neck. . . . No ; I mean no submission. Your bit of a Republic I recognise in no form or fashion. Come, sir ; quick with your answer."

I knew now that the Master meant business, knew

that it would be foolish to anger him more. "But, Mr Farmer," said I, humbly as I might, "you don't know the condition of things around you. May I say that the country is in the hands of the Catholics, that all the Protestants except yourselves are——"

"I know all about that," said the Master. "Tell yourself that I know more than you do, and give me your answer."

"But what could you do?" I persisted. "The thing is impossible. Why, all Ireland is against you. You daren't leave Rhamus——"

"That would be our affair," he interrupted. "Don't consider us, I say. Come, my question is waiting."

"Yes, but if we went others would come. Thousands and thousands——"

"Let them. We were ready once; we can be ready again."

I considered a minute. "Ah, but it's impossible," I cried. "Not even for my life could I do this. It would mean more bloodshed. You would be free to have your revenge."

"We want no revenge," said the Master. "That's in other hands than ours. We've only to wait a month or less and your bit of a Republic will be buried in the ditches. But we're tired waiting. The crops are being spoilt. There's work to be done. Tell your men to go home and hide their rifles; go to Dublin and bid them leave us alone. Give me your word now," said the Master, "that you'll do this and I give you mine that we'll do no more than mind our own business. Do you understand? Is your life worth the consideration?"

What could a man with his hands bound, a man

not yet tired of an unkind world, a man, God help him, who still hungered for sight of a woman's face; what, I say, could such a man do but bow to the inevitable? The terms were easy. There was no alternative. The Master was master now.

"Ah," said I, standing there so helpless, all my dreams and hopes scattered irretrievably; "ah, but I'll be disgraced."

"Not more than you are now, Shaw," was the pitiless answer. "Anyhow, a live dog is better than a dead lion."

I looked up, my face burning. "Is it the Irish way to kick a live dog?" said I. "Is it fair, Mr Farmer?"

"Is that fair?" retorted the Master, and turning pointed a finger at the women and children by the wall. "What about all the empty houses out there?" asked he, sweeping an arm towards Gorteen and Clackan. "What about the men you killed, Shaw, and the men you drove like sheep to Glann workhouse? What about—" He stopped; but his eyes looked towards Emo, the place of his heart. "Ah, great Lord! It makes my blood boil. Oh, believe me, you'll envy yet the dead dog. But enough," cried the Master. "Is your word ready?"

"How long do you give me?" I asked.

"Your word now—your soldier's word—and till twelve o'clock to-morrow to start for Dublin."

"I give you my soldier's word," said I; then turned my face to the wall whilst the Master cut my bonds.

Together we stepped across the courtyard towards the gateway. Before us the Protestants opened out right and left to give us passage; behind came the

five with Jan at their head. "Is it over?" I heard a woman ask as we passed the lean-to. "Only another night, Mary," answered someone; and Mary breathed a fervent "Thank God!"

Through the narrow lane of Protestants—all silent they stood and swaying with excitement—we went, over the Paddock and on to the trench; and there Jan stepped to the Master's side. "I'll see him out," said Jan.

"As you like," answered the Master. "Good-bye, Shaw."

"Good-bye," said I turning for a last look at him, for I admired the man. "Maybe we shall meet again, Mr Farmer."

"Not in this world, I hope, and surely not in the next," answered he; then turned away.

Over the plank I went with Jan at my heels, and together we crossed the Orchard. Down in Emo valley, up on Emo hill and in the ditches round Stonegate, the Red Leaguers were watching us, wondering doubtless as they lay. From Rhamus came a murmur of voices, then a sudden burst of cheering. *To-morrow at twelve o'clock*, the cheers meant; *only another night*.

"Well, Jamie," said Jan, in his pleasant way, as slowly we walked towards the plantation, the sunshine full upon us and our shadows soft on the grass; "so you've saved your skin, I see."

"Yes, Jan," I answered, my own way not less pleasant than his; "small thanks to you, all the same."

"Ah, no thanks in the world, Jamie. Believe me, if I had my way it's not as ye are you'd be steppin' through the sunshine. Faith no," said Jan with a laugh.

"Then how, may I ask? You'll please me, Jan, by telling me. I want to know the worst about you before I go."

"Do ye now, Jamie, man? That's kind of ye. Ah, I had a couple of notions. One was to send ye back on a hurdle, Jamie. Another was to let the wind swing ye from a branch. Then I had a fancy to see ye goin' back to your drove decked out in tar an' feathers. Only," said Jan in his sweetest way, "tar is scarce with us in Rhamus this minute, an' sure ye an' yours keep all the feathers to yourselves."

"Oh," said I. "Is that so, Jan? But I'm dull, my son."

"Ye are, Jamie. I was thinkin' of white feathers."

I stopped, groping wildly for a retort; and Jan facing me on the hillside, thumbs caught in the armholes of his waistcoat, cap cocked on his crown and head tilted, went on. "How is it you've been so slow, Jamie, in givin' us another chance at ye? Didn't ye know we were hungerin' to see ye? Didn't ye know I was waitin' to pay ye? Eh, Jamie? Sure it wasn't afraid ye were?"

He stood towering over me, big and fearless, clothed in his young strength and insolence; and for a minute my tongue lay helpless. Surely he was a likely lad. He and the hillside, with the trees and the rushes and the whins upon it, were akin, all bred of good clay and honest sunshine and the rain. Big and strong as a tree, and clean as a tree in springtime: so he stood among the rushes and looked upon me. "No, Jan," I said at last; "it wasn't afraid I was. I was attending to your affairs, my bonny boy."

"Were ye, Jamie? Sure that was good of ye.

It's only what I expected, an' it's what I've heard myself once or twice. I hope, Jamie," said Jan, "ye enjoyed attendin' to my affairs. I'd like to hear ye say ye succeeded as you'd wish."

"Would you, Jan? Well, you must wait for the hearing. But you understand that it wasn't fear kept me from coming to you. Might I tell you that I've little fear now?"

"Troth, an' ye had need, my bold captain," said he with a laugh, "for I'd never think it to look at ye."

"Still I'm here, Jan. I'm ready to pay, Jan. Sure," said I mocking his speech, "it's not afraid ye are?"

Then he laughed again and drew away a little. "Well, God knows I am," he said, "just shiverin' with fear at sight o' ye. Divil as game a dunghill cock I ever laid eyes on. Man, you're a terror, Shaw. Lord alive, have mercy on my youth." He drew back another step, feigning dread the while; but I followed him quick, anger lashing me on.

"You unlicked whelp," I shouted. "By God, I'll teach you." Madly I flung myself at him and struck at his face. We closed, struggled wildly a minute . . . the next I was lying on the grass, with Jan kneeling on my breast and his fingers in my throat. "Eh, Jamie," panted he and with each word tightened his grip. "Ye would, Jamie? Ye would! Are ye paid? Are ye paid?"

I was paid. He took me by the collar and set me upon my feet. "There's your road," said he pointing to the plantation. "Save your dog's skin while ye have the chance. And see here, captain Shaw," said Jan hooking a finger in my tunic, "let me find my affairs in good order to-morrow by twelve o'clock or,

by the Lord that made ye, I'll have your blood if it takes me to the ends of the earth."

All the rest of that day I sat in Jan's room, aching and brooding. Still in my throat I felt his fingers working, and always his taunts rang in my ears. How could I repay him? In full sight of everyone, whilst the Protestants skirled by the trench and the Leaguers watched behind the ditches, maybe in sight of Leah herself as she looked across the valley, he had taunted and disgraced me. Why had I let anger lash me to such recklessness? Why had I not drawn and shot him on the hillside? How could I repay him? How?

His triumph was complete. He had paid his debt. To-morrow he would come over the valley and find Leah waiting for his arms.

Would he? Suppose he came and did not find her? Suppose I kept him waiting, made him seek Leah and me to some end of the earth? I was master yet. I could thwart him yet; could repay, could repay.

What did I care? Nothing mattered now, nothing but sweet revenge. What had she done to deserve my consideration? What had he done that did not deserve my repayment? Ah, it would be good to think of him coming over the valley and finding emptiness; good to watch her as we went slowly, slowly, away and away.

Should I? Up and down I strode from end to end of Jan's room, thinking, brooding; at last came to decision, then went down and out to the yard.

Some twenty or thirty of the men were playing

cards in the sheds; these I called out and briefly addressed them. I said that the Master and I had come to terms; that after midday to-morrow he and his would be answerable to the Republic, and the Commando as such be disbanded. They and all the others would, in the morning, disperse quietly to their homes, first giving me their word that they would behave as good citizens. During my absence on duty in Dublin, Adjutant Slane would be in command and they would obey him implicitly. I advised them to work hard on their farms and to await events with patience. To the Protestants they would do as the Protestants did, and would deal honourably by all women and children. To the wounded and those on furlough they would carry my words. At six in the morning the Commando would parade in the haggard for inspection.

They heard me in silence, saluted, and went back to the cards.

After the same fashion I spoke to the men on duty in the cordon. To Slane and O'Hea I gave instructions in the River house. About nine o'clock I came back to the parlour at Emo.

The lamp was lit, supper spread on the table (only soda bread, butter and cold bacon, poteen in a square bottle and weak tea for the women, could we count on now); and by the table John sat reading *The Republic*, Susan knitting an orange and blue sock, and Leah sprigging linen on a hoop.

"Things don't seem prosperin' in Dublin, captain," said John as I took my place opposite Susan; "faith, no. *The Republic* is powerful plain-spoken the day about things; says it'd be well if some people who

ought to know better would talk less an' do more. From all accounts, there's ructions at times in the Assembly, an' sure it's meself can't make head or tail of its doin's at all. Ye might say there were as many parties as members; an' for business, sure it's callin' each other names they are half their time. An' I see there was a riot last evenin' in College green over the scarcity of bread an' things. An' the ships don't come from America. An' the first cargo of transported Protestants was sent back by the English fleet or somethin'. An' *The Republic* talks about traitors, an' scallywags, an' gutter-snipes, an' says there'll be cracked heads before long in the Gover'ment if things don't mend. Aw, fine doin's, indeed, up Dublin way, captain; fine doin's indeed."

"Yes, John," said I, "so it seems. Well, maybe we'll have closer sight of the doings before long. But no matter now. Cut me a trifle o' that bacon, like a man, for it's fair famished I am."

It was our last supper together, and I made the best of it; for the time put away dull care and flashed out in my old-time manner. With John and Susan I was merry and playful by turns, rallying John on his appetite, taking Susan to task because of her weakness for tea; whilst all my graces of speech and manner I aired for Leah's sake. Then, supper being over, of a sudden I changed my note. I fell thoughtful, plaintively reminiscent. I recalled the many pleasant hours we had had together. I asked pardon of them all for the discomfort I had caused them; thanked John for his service, Susan for her constant attention, Leah for her graciousness to my unworthy self and her care of my wounded men. "You have

all been very kind to me," I said. "What you have done I can never forget. This was a comfortless place, ma'am, till you came to our rescue ; what those poor fellows would have done without you, Miss Leah, heaven only knows, and therefore heaven only can reward."

I paused a minute, whilst Susan wiped a tear and John mumbled a broken word ; then pushed back my chair and, with my eyes on Leah's downcast face, continued. I feared the time had come to break up our little party. That day something had happened which necessitated my leaving the Commando for a while and going on duty to Dublin. I had to make a report at headquarters. I wished to make representations which possibly would affect the future of the Protestants confined in Rhamus castle. But I wanted company and I needed witnesses. Therefore my plans were, that to-morrow Susan should return home or take shelter for a week with a friend, and that John and Miss Leah should bear me company to Dublin. For various reasons I meant going by road—one chief reason being my desire to see the state of the country—for other reasons had decided on Miss Leah's going. The change would do her good. She would be under her father's protection. I wished to show her Dublin in its new condition and wished to have her evidence—she being one who had witnessed my doings from the first—if necessity came. "What do you all say?" asked I, at last, and looked from one to one around the lamp.

John expressed his cheerful willingness to do my bidding ; Susan sighed tearful consent to what had to come and couldn't be helped and sure the Lord would

preserve her ; but Leah sat silent, hands crossed on the table and her eyes upon them.

"And you, Miss Leah?" I asked. "What do you say to my plans?"

She sat silent a goodly while ; then raised her face. I saw how pale she was, how disappointment strove with suspicion in her eyes. "Why should I go, Mr Shaw?" she asked.

"I've explained, Miss Leah. But I'll give my reasons again if you wish."

"Why couldn't mother go ;" she asked, "an' leave me in her place?"

"Because you can serve me, Miss Leah, and your mother cannot. And I've mentioned other reasons."

"Yes, but not all maybe," she answered, her eyes quick with suspicion.

"I've mentioned all the best, Miss Leah."

"But there's—there's the wounded," she pleaded.

"I'm sending them to their homes in the morning."

"But I don't wish it, Mr Shaw," she pleaded. "I'd rather not go."

"Yes, but I do wish it, Miss Leah."

"Ye say so?" she asked, her eyes begging piteously for my mercy.

"I say so, Miss Leah."

She said no more. Perhaps she read my motive, perhaps she knew—by instinct or from those whispering Irish hills—what had happened that day in Rhamus. I know not. Just then I did not care.

"We start at seven in the morning, John," said I. "Have the gig ready in good time. And if you can get us a bit of breakfast, ma'am, before we start, then

all the better. Good-night, John. Good-night, Mrs Hynes. Good-night, Miss Leah."

John and Susan answered me ; but Leah, seated there by the lamp, hands folded on the table and her eyes upon them, said nothing.

CHAPTER XV

A FREE COUNTRY

NEXT morning I rose early, put on a tweed suit, packed my uniform and certain necessities in a bag, said good-bye to Jan's room and went down.

In the kitchen Susan was preparing breakfast; in the yard John was getting ready the gig; in the haggard the men were assembled, all heavy with sleep, silent, hungry.

"Lads," said I, when they had formed before me, "I want to say a few parting words. It may be that in a week or so I shall be back with you, but nothing is certain. Like yourselves I am at bidding of the Republic, and like you I must submit cheerfully to the will of those in authority. Should I be sent back I need not say how pleased I shall be to see you all again, but should this be our last sight of each other I hope all of you may keep kindly memories of your old captain. Try to think of me, whatever happens, as of one who strove to do his duty both to you and the Republic, and who, whatever may befall, must always have pride in remembering your good services. You have all done well, have been loyal men and good soldiers. We have had glorious hours together. I had joy in leading you. I part from you with unfeigned regret. But before I go may I say again that

your duty still is, what it always was, to continue good citizens of our Republic. Go to your homes resolved to be true to yourselves and to your country, peaceful, wise, obedient, and all must be well with you. You are now free men. Well you have borne your part. Remember that in so far as you respect your freedom so far will the work you have done be of good effect.

"And now, lads, good-bye to you. Remember me kindly to all I have no time to see, and say to them what I have said to you. Men, all together. Three cheers for Ireland, and God be with her and us!"

They cheered heartily, and cheered again for myself; then gathered round, and one by one gripped my hand. "Good-bye, captain," they said. "Safe there an' soon back to us. Good-bye. Good-bye."

It was a memorable parting. More than one faced me with streaming eyes. As I turned to go, they closed in behind me and cheered me again right to the kitchen door. Good faithful Hillsiders, would that your leaders had been worthier!

We made a hasty breakfast, John and Susan and I. John ate cheerfully, Susan sat choking back her tears in gloomy silence. I sat in the Master's chair and heard Leah move to and fro in the room above. Up and down. To and fro. Up and down.

Should I ever sit in that parlour again, ever see those pictures in their walnut frames, the desk in its corner, the polished sideboard and the little bookcase; ever turn again and look through the window towards Rhamus hill? We had spent pleasant hours there. I had dreamed much, planned much, brooded much, within its quiet walls. Often I should look back and

see the lamp shining on the table, Leah sitting near it with the light glowing in her hair. Yes; but not always, not to the very end. Tramp-tramp-tramp; surely, considering all things, she might have let me go with kindlier sound than that in my ears.

My horse stood ready. Before the door the gig was waiting, bags and bundles under the seat, rugs and shawls on the cushion, a bag of corn swinging from the axle-tree. Upstairs began a sound of weeping, came nearer and more near: over the threshold came Susan clinging forlorn to Leah's arm. "Aw, good-bye, good-bye," wailed Susan. "God in heaven be with ye all. Ah, I'll never see ye again—never—never. I know it well. All that long way out into the world! Good-bye, Leah. Ah, good-bye, John. Good-bye, sir, good-bye," moaned Susan, and clutching my arm whispered brokenly: "You'll be good to her? You'll look after them both? You'll send them safe back to me? Ah, promise me, promise me!"

"I promise you, Mrs Hynes," said I. "Don't fret. They'll surely come back to you. Woman dear, it's only a little trip we're taking out through the hills."

"Ah, yes," moaned Susan. She kissed Leah passionately, folded John to her withered breast, and to the gate followed us, wailing her good-byes and wringing her hands. But Leah, in her black dress, cotton gloves and straw hat, never turned her face or answered a word. Rigid she sat beside John in the creaking gig, lips set and hands folded tight, her eyes looking steadily across the valley towards Rhamus. What mattered a mother's good-byes to her whose heart, I suppose, was sick with its own farewell?

Slowly we went down into the valley, up to Stone-

gate, and turned along the Bunn road. Through a gap in the hedge I had last sight of Emo, the men still watching in the yard, Susan now seated on the doorstep; over the hedge-tops had last look at Rhamus castle as slowly we went down through the sunshine to the River house. Silent and grim it stood upon its hill, a thin streak of smoke rising above its walls and all its loopholes empty. No need to keep watch in Rhamus any more. *To-day at twelve o'clock*, everyone was thinking; *to-day at twelve*, said Jan my enemy to himself, and thought of his wild rush across the valley. Ah, Jan, my sweet lad, better had you kept watch until the end. See, here we go away from you, Leah and I. And Leah looks in vain. And I am filled with the joy of repayment.

Only a few men were in the River house, and these saluted silently in the doorway as we passed. We crossed Thrasna river, entered wild Bilboa, up and down went on past the rush-clad hills, the dewy valleys, the low white cottages peeping through boor trees and poplars. Here and there a heavy-eyed peasant watched us from the fields, sometimes a woman looked out through a smoke-wreathed doorway. Work had not yet begun in this part of our Republic. Sure it was time enough.

Bunn town was just waking as we passed through its stony streets. The shops were still closed. At intervals, a citizen stood smoking and propping a white-washed wall. In the post office doorway Mr Ted Rainey was taking the air, his feet crossed, shirt sleeves turned high, a pipe in his mouth. "Hillo, captain," he called; "off for a jaunt? Sure it's early ye are." "Yes, Ted," I answered. "There are no

letters I suppose?" "Aw, there might," said the postmaster. "Herself'll see when she comes down. Call in when you're comin' back."

Out beyond Bunn on the way to Glann, the country-side was stirring to the labours and pleasures of a new day. Men sat smoking on the ditches, or leaning upon their spades, or dawdling among the turf-clamps; here a woman was spreading washed garments on a hedge, there a child was driving in the cows, now and then we passed someone urging an ass and creels towards Bunn, or a couple jaunting in a cart for Glann. In a while we came to a region of lush meadows and fat pastures, big square houses with broken windows and shattered doors standing empty among them—the homes once of thriving Protestants. Farther on, youths were shooting marbles on the road and playing pitch and toss for halfpence. In Leeny village, a party of men on the way to a cock-fight were drinking in the public-house; two dogs were fighting on the street and some children teasing the local Tom-fool. Everyone seemed happy and taking life easily. Why worry over trifles, or go slaving in the sunshine? Food would come somehow. Sure the crops were doing the best. Sure the Lord would provide. "Now it's well to be some people," said John in the gig, his eyes on a group who were making poteen in a field. "Yes, John," said I; "it's surely well to be living in a free country. What do you think, Miss Leah?" She did not answer. Thus far on our journey she had not spoken a word.

Nearing Glann the road become thronged with folk in their Sunday best; and Glann itself we found full of Leaguers come in to the town sports. Green flags

hung in the streets. A drum and fife band went playing up and down. There were standings and booths, shooting galleries, gambling tables, everywhere. Many wore green sashes. Some of the Glann commando went strutting about in slouched hats and leggings, rifles on shoulder, their eyes mighty stern. I saw little food in the shops, but drink was plentiful. At the hotel, where we rested our horses, we had something to eat (paying three prices for mere dog's rations); then followed the crowd uphill to the sports. No one molested us, for no one had time to guess that we were Protestants.

On the crest of a hill that overlooked a lake, diversion was in full swing. There were foot races on the programme, jumping and wrestling competitions, contests between local athletes at throwing the hammer and putting the weight, obstacle races, sack races, egg and spoon races, a football match, a match at hurley for the championship of Glann, and all the rest. The hubbub was great. Sporting gentlemen were shouting the odds. Ballad-singers swelled the din. Gipsies and Jews yelled by their shooting galleries and roulette tables. Fortune-tellers, thimble-riggers, card-sharpers, trick o' the loops, had each their noisy following. Glib simpletons with hooked noses sold purses of sovereigns for half-crowns. On the stalls and standings were displays of cheap jewellery, ginger-bread and sugar-sticks, oranges and mineral waters. The shebeen tents were crowded. Round a score of carts men and women were drinking porter and whiskey and poteen, laughing, shouting, quarrelling. Already many were drunk, many glorious. Fights were common. Black-thorns whirled and fell. With skirls and yells a body

of townsmen crashed into a party of Leaguers and the skulls went cracking. It was an orgy ; and right in the midst of it just one minute of deep silence—the chapel bell tolling the *Angelus*, women bowed on the hillside, men muttering into their hats—then fiercer than ever that orgy again.

Twelve o'clock in the Republic? At that hour, thought I, there was revelling in Rhamus also, and Jan was rushing across the valley. Ah, poor Jan. And poor Leah.

"Come," said I, "enough is enough. Let us respect the *Angelus*."

From Glann we went southwards through the lower districts of Cavan. A long bare road ran winding over a wild bare country-side, past gloomy bogs and whin-covered hills, past wretched little holdings and squalid little houses, over wind-swept hills, along smiling valleys, through huddled villages. The sky was high and soft as mist. The air was languid with kindly heat. Through a haze of peat smoke and sunshine we looked out and away to the bounds of the shadowy mountains. Not often had we signs of prosperity. Only seldom did we see work in hand. Everyone seemed keeping holiday, waiting in the sunshine for what might come. They were great times. Republics of a surety were grand institutions. I felt sad as I rode ; sad because of what I saw, sad because of Leah's ways. John was quite friendly ; but Leah sat cold as a stone.

Some ten miles from Glann the country became rocky, then hilly again ; and thereafter our journeying was through pleasant places. Tall hedges shaded us ; beyond them the fields were clean and fertile, heavy

with fair crops and flocks and herds. We saw pine groves and fox covers, gardens and orchards. Lawns sloped down from old grey houses hidden deep in trees. The people looked healthy, well-clad and sober, their houses trim and comfortable. I thought of Gorteen as I rode, such bounty of nature and toil around me, and in front Lough Nee with its islands and wooded shores. Only, Gorteen was trampled, and here was no sign of strife. For we had now crossed the line and were down in Catholic Ireland.

About fifteen miles from Glann, however, and thirty from Emo, we came upon an empty house ; and there decided to pass the night. It stood back a little way from the road on a slope overlooking Lough Nee, a lodge at the gateway, a wide avenue leading down between pines and firs, and round it everything that was good—fine offices, big haggards, fat fields, an old garden, a lawn half filled with gnarled apple trees growing high in shelter of great beeches and chestnuts. Here, until some six weeks before, had lived a Protestant with his wife and children ; now he was a prisoner in Kells and the rest were scattered among their friends. The house was ransacked ; even the range was torn from the kitchen and the knocker from the door. Hardly could we find the means wherewith to cook and eat the food that we had brought from Glann. What hay was in the haggard just fed the horses ; it took us long to gather enough straw to make John and myself a bed. For Leah there was no better prospect than to sleep on the cushions of the gig.

It grieved me to see so beautiful a place in such

condition. Already the grass was thick on the walks, the garden become a wilderness. Hundreds of roses bloomed forlorn on the walls and above the boxwood hedges. The strawberry bed was trodden flat. Only a few broken fruit trees were left. Even the beehives had gone. Yet the place was still beautiful; so peaceful and fresh, so quick with the pastoral life of summer-time. It was an earthly paradise. There we seemed miles away, secluded, hidden, from the madding crowd and its ignoble strife. How well to spend and end my days in such a spot, contented, happy, with one I loved to keep me company. If only I might have the chance!

Up and down I paced past the rifled flower beds, brooding, dreaming.

In a while, just as dusk was falling, I turned into the garden; and there in a thatched summer-house found Leah sitting alone. Without hat or jacket, clad from neck to feet in black, her hair falling low about her forehead, one hand supporting her cheek and the other holding a white lily she had gathered, like to some goddess of the dusk she sat, proud and silent and sombre, offering to the night its first star.

"Ha. So it's here you are, Miss Leah," said I, entering and taking a seat by the doorway. "I've been thinking about you this hour. I hope you're not tired after your journey?"

She shook her head. "No, I'm not tired," she answered.

"Good. I'm glad of that. And you find this a pleasant place to rest in?"

"Ah, yes. Pleasant enough." Her voice was weary,

tearful it may be. "It's—it's pleasant enough," she said.

"I think it's glorious," said I; "simply glorious. I could stay here for ever. Such a spot I didn't think was in all Ireland. Wouldn't you like to stay here, Miss Leah, if you had the chance?"

"It depends," said she. "Maybe I might, maybe I mightn't."

"It depends upon who was with you, eh?" She did not answer me. "My company wouldn't do, Miss Leah?" Not a word. "Even if I got this place for my own and laid it all at your feet, I wouldn't do?"

She rose at that, quickly and with an impatient stamp of her foot. "Are ye never to understand me? Even if ye got the world for your own——" she began; but rising I stepped towards her. Through the latticework the dusk came in and enveloped her, and all the sweetness of evening was about her. Shadowy was her figure, dim her face and dim the lily in her hand: and all my foolish heart yearned for her.

"Leah," I cried, "for God's sake hear me. Is my love nothing? Have you not punished me enough? Is it a crime to hunger for you and to tell you of my hunger? No—no. Hear me, Leah. Hush. Hear me, Leah."

"I'll hear nothing," she said. "I've answered ye—I've answered ye."

"But not now, Leah, for you have not heard."

"I answered once for ever, an' ever, an' ever."

"No—no. Not for ever, Leah. Come. Sit down again and let me tell you what I've been thinking."

"What you've been thinking is nothin' to me. See

what you've done. See where I am. Keep from me—keep from me or I'll curse your face!" She stepped towards me boldly as though she meant to strike. "Let me past."

I spread my arms across the doorway. "Ah, but you must hear me," I said. "Don't go."

"Let me past," said Leah.

"No, no. You must hear me."

"Let me past."

I stood aside and let her pass. Out she went into the dusk and the shadows; and like a shadow went down the garden, under the fruit trees, past the strawberry bed, and away from me through the gateway in the boxwood hedge. Then night fell.

Next morning we started early and took the road that winds round Lough Nee towards Kells. The day opened well, but hardly had we come to the pastures of Meath when rain drove us to shelter in a wayside house. We were kindly received. The farmer was an intelligent man; and by the kitchen fire he, when he had learnt my name, informed me on the state of the country. He said that on the whole things were going well. People were settling down gradually to their old ways. Here and there the good-for-nothings were troublesome at times, but among his own class was every disposition to work for the best. Food was getting scarce and very dear; still, they had enough for present needs, thank God, and the crops were growing. He found life under the Republic to be much the same as under the old government. Freedom was good but was not everything. Soon, he supposed, the tax collector would be calling again; soon there would be laws to be obeyed and local

regulations. So far, it was every man for himself; but presently that must end, and the sooner the better. The children ought to be at school. Some people ought to be in jail. Trade was at a standstill. He wanted to sell his cattle. The trains were going as they pleased. He was never sure of getting a letter. Who would mend the roads? "Ah, there's a power to be done yet, sir," said he; "before all's as it ought to be. We're better in some ways, I suppose, and worse maybe in others; but sure they're early days yet. Give them time up above. We'll see better times yet, please God, before long."

"I hope so," said I, not very cheerfully. They needed a deal of time up above. What I read in *The Republic* of the beginnings of government did not give me confidence. The ships were long in coming with food from America. The black North was still rebellious, Belfast defiant, Enniskillen holding out, Derry only just taken at fearful cost. Who held the sea? What was England doing? Was she powerless to strike, or unwilling, or merely waiting her opportunity? And if she did strike was the Republic prepared?

The day showing signs of improvement, we pushed on through a cheerless drizzle to Kells. Little was afoot in that pleasant old town. A few carts were in the streets, a few loiterers about the doorways. The shopkeepers stood waiting for goods that did not come and customers that would not. The bank was closed. The schoolhouse was full of captive Protestants. The police barracks was wrecked. The windows of the church were broken. Before the station two or three cars were waiting for a chance train, their drivers kill-

ing time over a game of cards, two of the local Com-mando playing pitch and toss with the porter, the stationmaster reading a newspaper in the doorway. On the post office sign, *I.R.* was printed in large white letters. A green flag floated above the round tower on the hill.

Sunshine came with the afternoon, and through it we went on along the valley of the Blackwater. We were now in the garden of Ireland, a beautiful district where the grass grew tall in a night and the cattle fattened before your eyes. "Lord, but this is the place," said John, his eyes hungry on the fields; "sure fifty acres of this would be a man's fortune. Nothin' to do but turn in the shorthorns, put your hands in your pockets, an' wait for the next fair-day. Ach, if only I could swop yon hillside in Clackan for a piece of it—if I only could!"

"Yes, you'd be made up, John," said I. "But what do you think, Miss Leah? What would you give for the hillside in Clackan this minute?"

What would she have given? I could only guess. Patiently she sat in the gig, a sombre figure in her black dress and straw hat; head bent, lips tight and eyes on her cotton gloves. Were her eyes tearful? Did she care anything for those lush fields and fat cattle? Would she have given everything, think you, at that minute—sunshine, beauty of sky and prospect, the pleasures that were and those that might be, peace, freedom, my company—for just a sight of home and of Jan waiting there? Maybe so. As John said, women are strange mortals.

We spent the night in Navan, by the banks of the famous Boyne water, staying at a wretched hotel kept

by a red-headed ruffian named O'Leary. The food was poor and scanty, the beds were dirty and thickly populated, till dawn dogs howled in the yard, roisterers diverted in the street, citizens sang and fought in bar and parlour; and for such accommodation O'Leary charged us nearly three pounds. "Oh, but this is robbery," said I when the bill was presented, and began my list of complaints.

"You're mighty particular, me boy," said O'Leary. "You'd be forgettin' that times are hard. If I were you," he went on with a leer, "I'd pay an' say nothin', for we've a quick way with Protestants in these parts since somethin' happened."

"Have you?" I answered; then laughed and by means of my uniform and certain documents proved to him who I was. "Now what do you say, my gentleman?"

He stood scratching his red head and staring at me. "Lord, the fool I was," said he.

"You're right," I said. "But wait. By heaven, I'll make an example of you. I'll have the law of you."

Then O'Leary spat on the floor. "Ah, law be damned," shouted he. "Sure it's ten fools I am didn't find ye out sooner an' charge ye twice as much."

All that day, in pleasant weather and through a fine country, we went steadily down towards Dublin. Little happened on the way. Once, a party of citizens stopped us and demanded money. Again, a village mayor, carrying a rifle and wearing a green scarf and slouched hat, arrested us as Protestants and enemies of the Republic; detained us a while in

his little shop and, when I had proved our innocence, drank our health and his own with civic honours. Near Tara's hill cock-fighting was in progress. Lower down we met a funeral procession, the coffin borne on poles, women weeping by it and behind them a crowd of drunken men. Farther on sports and races, with bands, stalls, flags, were being held, the local Deputy in attendance on his jaunting car and some noisy citizens from Dublin in wagonettes. Almost in sight of the metropolis we saw a man who had taken possession of a Protestant farm, tried in a field by judge and jury of his peers, condemned, and sentenced to a ducking in a horse pool. So, the hand of law being withered in the glare of freedom, does human nature repeat itself.

CHAPTER XVI

GOD SAVE IRELAND

LATE in the evening we reached Dublin and went jogging wearily over its noisy cobble stones. The shops were all shut. Many of the streets had been re-named in Gaelic, in some the lamps were not yet lighted, all smelt and looked as if they had not been cleansed since the founding of the Republic. Green flags waved everywhere, from windows and balconies, over roof and monument, in strings across the roadway, in festoons along the houses. Traffic went as it might. The crowds of citizens did their own sweet will, all orderly enough but disporting themselves like children ; these singing as they went, those loitering on the pavements, here a band of urchins marching gaily to sound of a tin whistle, there a group of youths and maidens frolicking up and down the roadways. Everyone seemed happy. Rich and poor, the bare-footed urchin and the spruce buckeen, made merry together. Some humorist had hung an empty whiskey bottle round the neck of Father Mathew's statue in Sackville street. Four flags hung over the railing round Nelson's pillar. The O'Connell monument was draped in green. Opposite the Bank of Ireland a crowd was enjoying a fight between two drunken coal-heavers. The statue of

King William in Dame street was wrecked. All the front windows of Trinity were broken. Many of the shops in Grafton street had been looted and a few burnt out. In St Stephens Green hundreds were dancing in the twilight to the music of a band. I saw no police, no signs anywhere of authority or order. Here at the fountain head of government, the heart of our Republic, the seat of our Assembly, was not yet laid even the foundations of government. Here, as elsewhere in Ireland, the one law established was : Do as you like and live how you can. Think of a city left to its own devices, everything free and nothing done, the streets not cleansed, the lamps not lighted, water scarce, food at famine prices ; and say if it is not to the people's credit that excesses were not the rule. But what, in heaven's name, were the Leaders about that such things could be? What was being done in the Assembly gathered there in the Rotunda? Was this establishing a Republic? Was it for this men had fought and died among the hills? Ah, the hopelessness that weighted my heart, as I jogged after the gig in that glad summer evening. On every dim wall the writing was plain.

We left our horses and the gig in a yard by Harcourt street station, and ourselves found accommodation with my old friends, Miss Lydia and Miss Olivia, at their private boarding establishment in South Circular road. They welcomed us heartily and soon made us comfortable. It was pleasant to find ourselves again in something like home. Everything was beautifully clean, well-ordered, cheerful ; and though supper of necessity was frugal it was served like a feast. Throughout the meal we were merry

together, even Leah relaxing into cheerfulness; but when Leah had gone to bed and John said good night, I sat through a solemn hour whilst the ladies told their woes. For them the Republic had no charms. They longed to escape to England or France. Day and night they lived in terror and in fear of their lives. Every knock that came, every foot that sounded on the pavement, they dreaded as a summons to imprisonment or death. The noisy crowds that passed, the plebeians shouting for bread, the rioters greedy for loot, the commandoes tramping, the Republicans cheering and singing, drove them trembling to their knees. Hardly could they sleep. Food was terribly scarce. For days they had had to go without water. Some nights they had spent in darkness. Their little hoard of money was nearly gone, their savings they supposed were lost. Only their trust in God sustained them. "Ah, they're terrible times, Mr Shaw," said Miss Lydia with a shake of her corkscrew curls; "God only knows what we have to endure." "But God will sustain us, sister," said Miss Olivia, a tear glistening on her withered cheek. "Let us trust in Him."

What consolation I could I gave the simple souls I said they need have no fear. I thought that very soon all would be well again. Presently order must be established; and who knew that England even then was not contemplating relief? Let them be patient. Let them hope for the best. And for the present let them be sure that their interests were mine.

That comforted them. They thanked me warmly, promised to be sisters to Leah; rose and bade me a

cheery good night. "Ah, if only you had come to us sooner, Mr Shaw," said Miss Olivia, a coquettish smile on her dear face, her hands clasped on her virgin breast.

"Why yes, Miss Olivia," said I with a laugh. "But better late than never, you know. And remember that you and Miss Lydia have never before admitted that it was good to have a man in the house."

Next morning I was out betimes, eager to know the best and worst of the state of Dublin. I found little to restore my confidence. By day as by night affairs seemed hopeless, drifting helplessly towards chaos and ruin. The streets were squalid. Only a few tramcars were running. One had to search long to find a jaunting car. The Four Courts were shut. Urchins were playing ball against the Custom house walls. Most of the city mansions were empty or barricaded or wrecked; Rathmines, once so pleasant a suburb, was a wilderness; many shops in what used to be Grafton street, Dame street, Sackville street, were shut, some looted, the rest (as John expressed it) full of emptiness. Tea was quoted in the windows at ten shillings a pound, sugar at two shillings, flour at five shillings a stone, and other necessities in proportion. Meat and bacon were still cheap, and it was possible to buy potatoes and vegetables in the markets. But day by day even these things got scarcer, so that already a knowing man might see groping the gaunt hand of famine. Into Ireland since the founding of the Republic had come not an ounce of food or gold or material. Her harbours were idle. Those promised ships from America were never

sighted. The ships that went exploiting (with cargoes of Protestants, for instance) always came back as they went, turned and shepherded by a snorting gun-boat. We were cut off. Self-centred, self-contained, we lay lonely in our western sea, closed in on every side by a pitiless world. So far away seemed now those white shores of England, so infinitely remote those faithless coasts of America from which at intervals came flying to us, like stars out of the void, faint sparks of news. "Behold," spoke Michael Dooley, one night in the Assembly, "we are the orphan of the world—ay, an' its cynosure upon which all eyes are fixed—but in that orphanhood we as a nation glory an' those watching eyes we scorn."

Poor lonely orphan. Poor cynosure of a nation set in the ring of a heedless world. Poor peasants who had bled for a Cause betrayed; poor citizens waiting patiently for what the Lord might send. Poor worthless leaders wrangling and mouthing together. Poor Republic drifting as it might towards chaos, with not so much as a President appointed to cry Halt through the gloom. In my mind's eye, as I walked those hopeless streets, so gay amid their squalor, so careless of the shadows of doom, I saw worse than rebellion raging among the hills, worse than looting among the empty shops. Was there no man in Ireland worthy of race and country who should rouse the people again; rouse them now to consciousness of their peril, cast out those worthless leaders, and save and make the Republic? Where was that great Man Above? All the Numbers, where were they? Was there no one? Could not I——?

Bah! What better was I than another, I who

could not conquer a handful of Protestants on a hilltop, I who could not bend a woman's will?

Let the Celt go. Let the Saxon come.

About twelve o'clock I went to the Castle, there to make my report on affairs in Emo and Rhamus. But no one wanted me and my report; no one seemed to know anything or to have anything to do but stroll about the yards, or stare through the windows, or puff tobacco smoke at the official ceilings. From this one to that, from secretary Magee to secretary Duff, to councillor O'Shea to plain Mr O'Rourke, I was passed on; at last in a dusty little room, half way up a winding stair, found a snub-nosed young buck in a tweed suit and brown boots who was willing to hear me. "Fire away, captain," said he, tilting back his chair and flinging his feet across the end of his table—that end not occupied by bottles and glasses and pipes and newspapers and novels.

He took my fire calmly through a screen of tobacco smoke, and when I had finished waved his pipe stem at me. "Ah, don't be worryin', Shaw," said he. "Man, it's nothin' at all. Sure ye did your level best. Leave it all to me, my son, an' I'll see ye righted."

"Thank you, Mr O'Brien," said I; "but excuse my saying that you don't quite understand. My own affairs may be nothing, but it is for the authorities to consider whether affairs in the district I had the honour to command are satisfactory. At any moment, remember, a conflict may take place between my men and these Protestants. I have only their word to rely on. I cannot be held responsible——"

"Man, there's no responsibility," interrupted Mr O'Brien. "Don't be worryin' at all over trifles like

that. It's only a flea-bite, Shaw. What can your handful o' Protestants do, anyway, supposin' them to break their word. Why, if we bothered ourselves with such trifles, we might just put up the shutters."

I stood looking at this snub-nosed buckeen, with his pipe and his novel, his row of bottles and litter of glasses, and my thought was that here before me sat personified in all its majesty the Government of our Republic. Nothing mattered. All were trifles. Leave everything to chance. Providence would work out all for the best. "No doubt you are right, Mr O'Brien," said I; "still you will oblige me by laying my case before the authorities. I have pledged my soldier's word. I wish to be relieved of responsibility. I am willing and ready, if necessary, to stand in my defence. Do you understand me?"

"Partly," answered my buckeen. "Oh, I understand your case well enough, an' I'll see to it. It's yourself, Shaw, that troubles me. Faith, you'll take things easier before you're a week in Dublin. Take a friend's advice an' just leave well alone."

"I will, Mr O'Brien," said I turning for the door. "And God save Ireland."

The rest of that day I spent with John and Leah upon the lonely slopes of Howth, in sight and sound of the unchanging sea. So restful a time we had together. John was like a schoolboy on holiday, sportive, garrulous. "Boys, the place it is," he would say. "Wonderful—wonderful. Lord, the view it is across that stretch of waters—away an' away to the ends of the world, you'd think." Leah said little, but it soothed me to watch her placid face. I wondered sometimes, she standing rapt among the heather gazing

down at the sparkling sea and I silent beside her, whether in reality she were not looking back upon the green fields of Emo, eyes and heart roving there with him that was all her world. What was Jan doing? I asked myself. Was he following me as he had vowed to follow? Was Leah's face placid because, with her woman's instinct, she knew that he was hot in her quest? Did she know, or guess, that even then he was prowling the streets of Dublin?

In the evening I went to the Rotunda and saw the Assembly at work. The walls were draped with flags and banners; among them mottoes in Gaelic, and a painted device showing Erin crowned with laurels and plucking at a harp. Rough school-benches were ranged on the floor in shape of a horseshoe; and in these sat the Deputies, each with his inkpot and writing pad, his water bottle and tumbler. Facing the benches, in the mouth of the horseshoe, sat Mr President in a rostrum, a bell at his hand and a silk hat on his head. Behind him stood six burghers in green uniforms and armed with rifles; before him sat three clerks, wigged, gowned, almost hidden behind despatch boxes and piles of documents. On his right sat what was called the Ministry; on his left what was called the Opposition; in front all the adherents of either party, of themselves and each other. All told, the Assembly that night numbered one hundred and five members; of whom fifteen were Ministers, some ten or twelve in banded opposition (these being themselves aspirants to power), and the remainder Neutrals, Followers, Republicans, Nationalists, Free Traders, Protectionists, Radicals, Socialists, Individualists, and all the rest.

There were parties of two, of three, of one. Michael Dooley called himself an Agrarian. A slim dark man, with humorous eyes shining behind his pince-nez, was known to the reporters as the Fifteenth party. Somewhere, I suppose, among the benches were the Numbers, the Leaders, perhaps The Man Above; but I could only guess at their identity. Behind Mr President was the Press gallery. Outside the horseshoe, on chairs and forms, sat the visitors, a motley crowd kept in order by ushers with long green staves.

A code of rules governed the proceedings, but only Mr President seemed aware of their existence. There were frequent interruptions, exchanges of personalities, scenes, uproars, in which, despite the ushers and the threats of Mr President, the visitors often participated. Still, work of a kind was done; and the most cynical observer could not deny that with eloquence and ability the Deputies were richly gifted. I heard several excellent speeches, many wise and trenchant observations; was entertained with more in the way of wit and humour, irony and good-humoured badinage, than would enliven St Stephen's for a year. Mr President discharged his duties with rare tact and distinction. The little man with the pince-nez was an entertainment in himself. Michael Dooley in course of an oration on the Nationalisation of the land evoked loud applause. When the debate on a motion for sending Ambassadors to foreign courts was resumed, a portly man, with the face and manner of a cardinal, spoke to the negative with such fire and conviction that the house resounded. A duel between a Minister and the leader of the Opposition,

following on the refusal of Ministers to declare their foreign policy, was so masterly a performance that the benches howled at Mr President for intervening. It was my fortune to hear a motion : *That a President be elected to the Republic without delay* : supported strongly, opposed feebly, yet finally defeated, amid scenes of disorder, by a majority of five.

Why was the motion defeated? Why had not a President been elected long before? Who had made these so-called Ministers? By what right did they misgovern? Why was every motion defeated or withdrawn or postponed? I learnt from *The Republic*, and indeed myself gathered from the debates, that in the Assembly, among Ministerialists equally with the rest, were at work so many jealousies and animosities that anything was possible save business, and everything impossible except talk. Hence it was, I presume, that the city was in disorder, the country lawless, the Republic drifting headlong upon the rocks. Instead of doing the Assembly was palavering, instead of building the Government was preparing plans; and among our chosen was only the union of strife.

An adjournment having been moved and carried unanimously, I sent my name to Deputy Dooley; was warmly received by him and invited to supper in his rooms in Merrion square. There was assembled a distinguished company—a few Deputies, a few officials, some prominent citizens and their wives. Teresa, in flowered silk, old lace and jewels, was hostess; Michael, in broadcloth and fine linen, played host like any duke. There was abundance of meat and drink upon the table; two maid-

servants were in attendance ; on all sides were signs of affluence.

It ill becomes a guest to ask questions ; but more than once I wondered, in face of everything, whence Michael drew his means. In Glann town he owned a provision shop and some property . . . I could only wonder.

During supper, at Michael's request, I gave the company an account of our doings round Rhamus, omitting with discretion and splashing on plenty of local colour. Everyone seemed interested in my story ; all except Teresa and a certain young Deputy who sat on her left. It amused and pleased me to see Teresa play the charmer, to note the skill with which she displayed her withered charms and native graces, to watch her bind the victim with silken cords, to acknowledge the triumph in her eyes, the joy in her twinkling laugh ; above all, to note the cleverness she showed in hiding her real self under a cloak of affectations. Well, and why not ? It mattered nothing to me. And surely she is a poor woman who cannot take her opportunity.

Afterwards, when cards and music had begun, I had some quiet talk with Michael, over whiskey and a cigar, on the condition of affairs. He scouted my fears, said everything was for the best in the best of all possible Republics. Rome was not built in a day. Only fools leaped in the dark. Slowly but surely the foundations of government were being laid, and soon before the world would arise the fair edifice of regenerated Ireland. "Give us time, Shaw," said Michael. "Man, there's method in our talk. Think of all we've done. Imagine the difficulty of buildin' up a nation

from the very clay. Sir, there's been nothin' to equal it in all the records of history ; at this hour there's no such prodigious achievement bein' accomplished in the world. Talk of your American Confederacy. Talk of your British Empire. Sir, they grew. But we're creatin'."

Also, when her Deputy had gone, Teresa sat by me and talked a while. She was happy enough, she said, and contented with her new life. Gaiety suited her. She liked being in the whirl of things. Only—Well, she was weary at times ; and often she longed for the peace of the old home in Glann. These Dublin folk were strange in their ways, the men too serious, the women spiteful and jealous.

"But not all the men, Miss Dooley," said I. "There's one at least whom you find agreeable?"

"Ah, yes," said Teresa with a fading smile. "But even he's *hard*." She looked at me in her old bold way. "There's men I've liked better," she ventured.

I thought it was time to go. "Time and you will soften him, Miss Dooley," I said rising. "Meanwhile, you have all my best wishes. Good-bye and good luck."

"But you'll come again to see us," said Teresa. "I'm always here, an' you'll always be welcome."

I thanked her, promised to come again, and went.

On my way along Harcourt street, chancing to look up from my meditations, I saw Jan Farmer standing by the station steps on the opposite pavement. The light was bad. Jan's face was averted. In company with a group of revellers I slipped past unobserved.

Next day—not altogether, I may say, with a view of evading Jan—we spent among the beauties of

Wicklow, up on Bray Head, deep in the glorious valley of the Dargle, high on the rocky crest of the Scalp, lost in that magnificent Glen of the Downs. It was another happy day. John's delight was good to see. "Man, man," he was continually exclaiming, "isn't it wonderful? Such a view. Such a country. Ach, sure it's powerful." Leah also, to judge by her face—for we had not even sympathy in common now—seemed glad at heart. Was she glad because of the day, or because instinct told her that Heaven was near?

The following day being wet, I spent most of it indoors, hearing Miss Olivia play Mozart and Miss Lydia sing old love-lorn ballads in her languishing old way, playing whist with Leah for partner, helping John to whitewash the kitchen; but in the evening I took John and Leah to see a performance of *The Shaughraun* at the National (once the Gaiety) theatre. You should have heard John's comments, should have seen Leah's face.

Most of the next day went in rowing Leah and Miss Olivia about Dublin bay; across to Howth, back to Dalkey island where we lunched on sandwiches and watered claret, in and out of Kingstown harbour, down to the Bull lighthouse and back to tea on Killiney hill. Ah me, such memories I have of that glorious day; the sky so blue, the sea so placid, and there in the stern Leah and Miss Olivia sitting hand in hand. Why cannot such days last?

At night I went again to the Assembly; on my way home saw Jan on a tramcar in Sackville street. But once more his face was averted, and I evaded him.

So the days went, quickly and happily enough;

and then on the fifth day of our visit to Dublin, the seventh of July, it was, and in the afternoon of it, suddenly the blow fell.

I was bargaining for a little tobacco in Grafton street, when a newsboy went roaring past with a special edition of *The Republic*, containing news from America that an alliance had been formed between England, Germany and the United States. "What is it?" asked the tobacconist at sight of my face. "It's the beginning of the end," said I across the newspaper; and added to myself, "No longer need England crouch upon her cliffs. Now is she free to strike."

Yes, England could strike now and strike home; for Ireland was powerless to resist. She was hungry, wasted, lawless, disorganised; an Ireland gone to rack in a handful of weeks. Where now was that old spirit of nationality, that enthusiasm of confederacy, which had carried us to victory? Victory, where now was it and where its fruits? Where our united Ireland, free and established under a flag established? Where the defences, and the plans of defence? Where the ammunition, the stores of food? Where the leaders all ready, the commandoes waiting for the call?

Ah, well had our leaders reaped the fruits of victory, well had they served the Cause for which we fought; well had the Saxon judged, and watched, and waited. "Let them wrangle and sport and starve," had said the Saxon. "Let them think me powerless, or indifferent, or afraid. Give them time to weaken and me to grow strong: and then——"

Oh, wily Saxon. Oh, simple-hearted Celt.

At first not many saw what lay behind the news.

Here and there in the streets a few thoughtful men stood pondering or joined in discussion ; but the majority went their careless way. The clubs had not yet awoken. The Castle was still asleep. But the doors of the Assembly were shut and behind them the benches were in ferment.

At four o'clock *The Republic* by means of a leading article woke Dublin to excitement ; at five the streets were stirring, at six in tumult, crowds surging in the Castle yards, clamouring round the Rotunda, rushing here and there in bewilderment and dismay. The wildest rumours spread and grew. Some cried that the English had landed, some that the fleet was in Dublin bay ; some howled for the Ministers' blood, some to hang the Deputies. Edition after edition of *The Republic*, each redder than the last, was issued and scattered broadcast. Orators raved on the quays. Demagogues thundered from the balconies. The bells clanged out. Soon hell was loose in the streets of Dublin. And all because the hour of danger, the inevitable hour, found Ireland adrift without captain or crew, rudder or compass, on a stormy sea.

Late in the evening a proclamation was posted calling upon the citizens to rally to the flag. At midnight a second proclamation called out the commandoes. Later on a third proclaimed martial law in the Republic and summoned to arms every citizen below the age of sixty-five. Proclamations? Soon the walls of Dublin were thick with them. They were the only defences our Government by talk could raise. All night, despite them, the streets ran riot ; till morning wild rumour spread. About sunrise came news that English men-of-war

were in Belfast lough ; later came word that transports were in Lough Foyle ; at eight o'clock we knew that troops were landing at Cork and Galway, at nine that a fleet was steaming into Dublin Bay. It was time to find Jan.

I found him standing weary and dejected outside the Rotunda, hands thrust deep in his trouser pockets and his eyes vacant on the latest proclamation. "Well, Jan lad," said I laying a hand on his arm. "How goes it, my son?"

He turned sharply, eyed me for a moment ; then pounced at my throat. "Where is she?" he cried. "Tell me where she is, or, by God, I'll knife ye!"

I took his wrists in both hands and held them till his grip relaxed, my eyes meeting his calmly the while. "Easy, Jan lad," said I ; "you'll never find her like that. Let me go ; I want to speak to you quietly."

"Tell me now, Shaw," he cried, his face ugly with passion. "Damn ye, I can't trust ye!"

"But you can, Jan. I give my word. Come, let go, like a man. And be quick, for there's no time to be lost."

Reluctantly he dropped his hands, and close at my elbow went down Sackville street and over O'Connell bridge. "You've been looking for me, Jan?" asked I.

"I have, Shaw."

"And how is it you've not found me before this?"

"God knows," said he.

We passed the College and went up Grafton street, threading our way in and out of the throng, standing back to let a commando go past, shouldering through the ranks of excited citizens that obedient to the call were making for the great rendezvous in Phoenix park.

"Great times, Jan," said I as we skirted Stephens Green.

"Ay," he answered. "But there's better comin'. Listen." From the south came the roar of a gun. "That's a strange noise, Shaw," he said with a laugh. "It reminds me of somethin' we heard one day in Rhamus, when ye were amusin' yourself on Bilboa hill. Do ye mind that day, Jamie?"

"I do, Jan. And I remember many other days. How did you leave everyone in Emo?"

"Ah, the best, Jamie. But sure you'll be goin' back now to see for yourself? They're all waitin' for ye, Jamie, up yonder to lead them against the English."

"Are they, Jan? Well, maybe they'll see me. But tell me, like a man, how did you manage to trace me?"

"Ah, the easiest in life," said he in his old deadly manner. "A man of your appearance, Shaw, is not hard to track. It's like huntin' a fox with the wind in your face."

Up Harcourt street, with its throng of cheering commandoes and groups of gathering citizens, we went; and at top of it Jan stopped and took me by the collar. "Look here, Shaw," he said, "you're goin' far for that quiet talk. Maybe farther'll be too far for me."

"No, it won't, Jan," I answered. "Man, can't you trust me? Patience, lad, for a little longer. The place for that quiet talk is very near."

He stood looking at me, suspicion blent with surprise on his face. "You're a curious kind, Shaw," he said; "but I'll trust ye another while." And he loosed his hand.

Five minutes more brought us to the gate of our

lodgings in South Circular road. Together we went down the path, Jan wondering perhaps, I doleful enough. From their bedroom window Miss Lydia and Miss Olivia looked out upon the surging road, they straining doubtless for that sound from the south which, through God, meant their deliverance. Between the curtains of the dining-room I had sight of Leah standing back near the table and watching us come.

John answered my knock. "Why, captain," said he, "it's yourself at last. An'—an' Jan. Dear God, to think of this!"

"Yes, it's Jan," said I. "Take him in, John, and be kind to him. He wants a quiet talk."

I turned at that and, heedless of John's expostulations, went down the path and across the road to the further pavement; there turned and stood waiting. Miss Lydia and Miss Olivia saw me and waved their hands. John came to the door again and beckoned me over; but I gave him no heed. Presently two figures showed behind the dining-room window; Jan bent over Leah with his arm about her, Leah clinging to Jan with her face upraised as to Heaven itself. Just a minute I stood watching them, hoping perhaps that they might spare me a farewell look. But their own affairs held them. So raising my hat I turned away.

Three days afterwards I escaped to France in a fishing-boat.

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